

# A Commentary on the New Testament

Volume Two

First Corinthians through Revelation

Written by  
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## Preface

Note: The contents of this preface are the same as in the preface for volume one.

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 First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

## Salutation

- **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. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 1:1-3).**

In his salutation to the congregation at Rome Paul also referred to himself as a called apostle. The meaning of the word apostle is a man who is sent on a mission. And remember what Jesus said when he appeared to him in a vision from heaven: **“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 26:15-18).

Paul included Sosthenes in his salutation. The only other Bible reference to Sosthenes is in the book of Acts where it says he was the synagogue ruler. Paul was in Corinth, and **“Gallio being proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord attacked Paul and brought him to the judgment seat ...”** (Acts 18:12). However, Gallio refused to hear their accusations. Nevertheless, the record says, **“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).

Paul was obviously not in Corinth when he wrote this book, because it is addressed to them. Yet Sosthenes the synagogue ruler at Corinth was with him. Paul said near the end of this book that he was at Ephesus: **“But I will remain at Ephesus until Pentecost”** (First Corinthians 16:8). Why Sosthenes was with him is not told. It may have partly been because of the violent opposition in Corinth.

Paul said the Corinthian brothers were  
     called men (called by God)  
     holy men  
     sanctified in Christ Jesus  
     men who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Paul was directly called to be an apostle of Christ, but we are indirectly called to be disciples of Christ. We are called through the words of his good news of our salvation that have been recorded in the New Testament, whether it be by preaching or reading or some other means we hear of it. Jesus calls us that way, but remember, we must hearken to his call. We are not “called” men until we believe and obey him.

Moreover, when we believe and obey then we become holy men. Remember, holiness is purity. We become purified of our sins when Jesus redeems us. And that happens when we repent and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. Which is also how we, all men in every place, are sanctified. Sanctification is being purified and made holy. That opportunity is available to all men in every place, but only to those who are receptive to Christ and his good news. For without him we remain condemned in our sins.

Paul said that Jesus Christ was both our Lord and theirs. He meant that Jesus Christ was Lord of every man in every place who calls upon his name. Not only Lord of Paul and the Corinthians, but of every man who calls upon the name of Christ. And the way we call upon his name is by believing and obeying him. Hence, the words of this letter were written not only for the brothers at Corinth, but for **“all in every place who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** And that is true of all the words of the New Testament.

When Paul said, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ,”** I believe he was both stating a fact and expressing a hope. That statement is deliberately ambiguous, having a dual meaning. Paul was both saying grace was to them and peace from God and Christ, and also asking that grace would be to them and peace from God and Christ.

We can both have confidence that we have grace and peace from God and Christ, and can hope that we will have it from them. We are guaranteed spiritual grace and peace. Nevertheless, in the world we may not be blessed with grace and peace in material things.

For example, what grace and peace did the beggar Lazarus have in his earthly life? For the record says, **“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”** (Luke 16:19-21). Yet in the afterlife Lazarus was carried by the agents to Abraham’s bosom in heaven, while the rich man suffered the flames of Hades.

The rich man enjoyed grace and peace in this life, but not in the afterlife because he was selfish and heartless to the suffering of men like Lazarus. Lazarus had no grace and peace in this life, but he enjoyed grace and peace in the afterlife because he was a righteous man. Lazarus had no earthly grace and peace, but the rich man had those things in abundance. However, Lazarus had grace and peace in heaven, but the rich man did not. Therefore, fret not if you do not enjoy grace and peace while you live in this world. Rejoice that you will have those things in heaven with God and Christ. That is God’s promise to all who love and obey him.

### Paul was thankful for them

- **I thank my God always about you, for the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all speech and in all knowledge** (First Corinthians 1:4-5).

We know that God gives some grace to all men, because when Jesus spoke about God, he said, **“... he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Matthew 5:45). Indeed, without his continuous grace

the world would not exist. However, God gave special grace to the disciples at Corinth, because it was given to them in Christ Jesus. And not to them only but to all who love him. Therefore, Paul thanked God always about them. All who love God and his righteousness are a blessing to us.

In everything they were enriched in God, in all speech and in all knowledge. That means they had been enriched in everything essential for their spiritual salvation, and in their ability to bear fruit for him. They had all the knowledge they needed to live pleasing to him, and in skill with words to be able to teach and proclaim the good news of Christ to others.

## Confirmed and being confirmed

- **Just as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in not one gift, waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you until the end, irreproachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (First Corinthians 1:6-8).**

Paul said the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. That means the testimony, including the many kinds of evidence that Jesus was the Son of God, was accepted and established in their hearts. And that was confirmed by their faith and obedience to him.

The apostle John also said about having the testimony in us, **“He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified about his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son”** (First John 5:10-11). Therefore, the Corinthians came behind in not one gift. Paul no doubt also included the various special gifts of the Holy Spirit that God gave to some of the disciples in the early church. For he spoke at length about those gifts farther in this book.

Paul also said they were waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. That revealing will come at the end of the world, which Jesus prophesied when he said to his disciples, **“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.**

**“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 24:29-31).

And Paul said to the brothers at Thessalonica, **“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”** (First Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Paul also said that Christ would confirm them until the end, irreproachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. That means Christ would keep them established in his kingdom until the end of the world; that is, if they remain faithful to him. For while we live upon the earth we can still fall away, as Paul said, **“Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall”** (First Corinthians 10:12). He also said about himself, **“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).

When we remain faithful to Christ, then he keeps us irreproachable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. That means our spirits cannot be condemned for us to lose our eternal salvation. He keeps us irreproachable. As long as we remain true and faithful to him, we cannot be condemned in the day of the Lord, which is the time of the great judgment day when Jesus will reign supreme over all things. And that will not happen until the end of the world when Satan and all of God’s enemies are completely defeated.

## God is faithful

- **God is faithful through whom ye were called for the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord** (First Corinthians 1:9).

God is always faithful. Remember what Paul said to the Romans: **“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 [see Psalm 51:4], That thou may ever be justified in thy words, and may prevail when thou are criticized”** (Romans 3:3-4).

God is always true and faithful. Therefore, we have the ultimate assurance of our salvation—as long as we remain faithful to him. He called us for the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. When we become his disciples then we have fellowship with him, which fellowship will continue in heaven for eternity. What a great honor it is to have fellowship with the very Son of God.

## Let no divisions be among you

- **Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but ye may be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding** (First Corinthians 1:10).

When Paul besought them through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was saying his appeal was through the authority of Christ. It was the same as if it was done by Christ himself. Paul could use that authority because he was appointed an apostle by Christ. There is no man now who can claim to do anything authoritative in the name of Christ, although many men have made and continue to make that claim. Such men are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Beware of them.

In the name of Christ we immerse souls in water for the remission of their sins. But that ritual was authorized and commanded by Christ not by us. For just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said to his disciples, **“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). And Peter said to the Jews when the church was being established, **“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 besought them to all speak the same thing. That obviously means for them to agree about what they believed and taught. It would be ridiculous to take those words literally. In the Bible there are other such expressions that must be properly interpreted. He who genuinely seeks the truth of God will understand such words when they appear in the word of God. Scoffers will use them to attack the Bible.

When Paul besought them to have no divisions among them he was again speaking of what they believed and taught. He wanted them to be **“thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding.”** There is only one genuine doctrine of the good news of Christ, and we should all conform to it. The popularity of denominationalism in modern times is a direct violation of what Paul is saying here.

Notice how Paul said he wanted them to be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding. And that can only be done correctly through knowledge of the Holy Bible. That is the only way we can become properly and thoroughly prepared for unity. Foolish believers want to trust popular men to tell them what to believe. And that guarantees divisions such as the many separate denominations of believers now.

There is no doubt our Lord Christ condemns separate denominations of believers. Remember how he prayed that we be one just as he and the Father are one: **“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).

How then can believers in Christ tolerate separate denominations? Faithful disciples of Christ strive for unity; they do not tolerate divisions. Like the apostle Paul, faithful Christians condemn things like separate denominations.

It is very popular now to say that we are saved by faith only; therefore they argue, God does not care about the different doctrines, practices, and denominations among believers. The Bible condemns that evil idea, and Paul’s words here in the first part of this letter are part of that condemnation.

## Contentions among them

- **For it was declared to me about you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 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?** (First Corinthians 1:11-13).

Paul was informed about their divisions by a woman named Chloe. She is to be commended for informing Paul about them. We know nothing else about her because she is

not mention anywhere else in the Bible. Notice how Paul did not try to conceal the name of his informant. Secrecy is only needed when there is danger of harm being done. And Paul had confidence enough in his brothers at Corinth to know there would be no evil reaction against Chloe.

The early divisions of the Corinthians into the factions of Paul, of Apollos, and of Cephas (Peter) were the seeds of denominationalism. Even as today we have the factions of Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, just to name a few.

However, denominationalism in the early church did not develop then, because Paul and the other apostles quickly condemned it. Instead, it was after the time of the apostles that the perversions of the doctrine of Christ slowly grew, including the development of a hierarchical system of rule, which produced the Catholic Church.

When Paul mentioned some as saying “I of Christ” he listed them among those who claimed to be of Paul, of Apollos, and of Cephas. The reason he did not speak approvingly of those who said they were of Christ is probably because they were tolerating those factions. And that is just as bad as being part of a faction. Tolerating denominationalism is very popular in the world, but it is just as evil as the denominations themselves.

Paul asked them if Christ had been divided, if Paul was crucified for them, or if they were immersed in the name of Paul. He asked them those questions because he knew they had been taught the correct answers. And he wanted to remind them, to help bring them back to unity. Teaching the truth is the best defense against error. When light is allowed to shine it always dispels darkness.

## Paul never immersed in his own name

- **I thank God that I immersed none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest some man should say that I immersed in my name. And I also immersed the household of Stephanas. Besides, I know not whether I immersed any other. For Christ sent me not to immerse, but to preach the good news, not in wisdom of speech lest the cross of Christ would be emptied** (First Corinthians 1:14-17).

The only other reference we have to Crispus is the one in Acts that tells how he was the synagogue ruler in Corinth (see Acts 18:8). There are several other Bible references to Gaius, all favorable. I say more about him in my commentary on the book of Romans (see Romans 16:23). Stephanas is mentioned again near the end of this book (see 16:15-17). Nothing more is said about him in the New Testament.

Paul converted many souls to Christ, but he only immersed those few that he named here. When Paul said that Christ did not send him to immerse, but to preach the good news, he was not belittling the necessity of immersion. Remember, Jesus commanded immersion but he did not himself immerse anyone; his disciples did (see John 4:2).

The Bible says nothing about who should perform that rite. Of course, it is obvious the rite of immersion should not be done by unbelievers. Actually, there is no command that it should be done by anybody, which means a man could immerse himself if no disciple of

Christ was available. Although it is certainly much better to be immersed by a Christian witness.

Paul was no doubt busily occupied with his preaching and his teaching. It was better for him to enlist the aid of other brothers to do the work of immersing believers for the remission of their sins. Remember, immersion requires a pool of water sufficient to submerge a man. And there is no doubt the early disciples needed to travel to such places. If Paul immersed each of his converts, that would have used much of the time he had to teach and preach. It was simply practical for Paul not to himself immerse.

Paul also mentioned how the good news was not to be preached in wisdom of speech. Christ does not want the message of his good news overshadowed by the eloquence of how it is proclaimed. He does not want men attracted to it because of the splendor of the speech used to proclaim it.

He certainly does want us to use persuasive reasoning, because he himself used reasoning when he spoke with the Jews. And both Peter and Paul used reasoning to prove that Jesus is the Christ. Our way of proclaiming the good news of Christ should be to appeal to the intellect, not to the senses and the emotions, not by the clever way it is presented, not in wisdom of speech. And that includes all the popular entertaining ways that many now use to present it.

Otherwise the cross of Christ would be emptied. The cross of Christ symbolizes sacrificing our worldly lives so we can bear fruit in service to God. It is taking up our cross and losing our life for Christ so we can find it. As Jesus said, **“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).

Being attracted to the good news of Christ merely because of the cleverness and appealing wisdom of speech will not persuade a man to take his cross and follow behind Jesus, losing his life because of him so that he can find it. Mere wisdom of speech empties the cross of Christ because it appeals to the wrong motives. It misleads people into thinking that being a disciple of Christ is to have fun and be entertained.

## Wisdom and foolishness

- **For the message of the cross is of course foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is a power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will frustrate the understanding of those of understanding.**
- **Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world? 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 1:18-21).

Those who are perishing are those who will not believe. Hence, they think it foolish to sacrifice their lives for Christ, whom they do not believe. But for us who do believe in him,

and are therefore being saved, it is the power of God. It is his power because it promises eternal life for us, which is impossible for any other power.

The good news of Christ is foolishness to those who are perishing, but God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. I have studied all of the famous philosophies and religions of the world, and they are indeed foolish. They can easily be exposed as foolish with knowledge of the word of God.

Paul asked where was a wise man, where was a scholar, where was a researcher of this age. God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. None of them can answer the most basic questions. They do not understand how the world was made and why. They do not understand the meaning and purpose of our lives. They only offer feeble, unsatisfying, and often bizarre theories. Moreover, their ideas about how best to live our lives are foolish and destructive. Just look at the results of them.

Without the wisdom of God (from the Holy Bible) there are no wise men, scholars, and genuine researches. Indeed, they cannot even know God through their wisdom. Hence, by rejecting the word of God they remain in the dark about him, and no amount of worldly research will help.

God hates the proud but loves the humble. Therefore, God made foolish the wisdom of the world, the wisdom that makes them proud. As Paul said farther in this book, **“We know that all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (First Corinthians 8:1). Instead, God saves those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. Preaching is foolish in the proud eyes of the world, but not in the eyes of the humble souls who love him.

The scripture that Paul quoted is from the book of Isaiah: **“Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden”** (Isaiah 29:14). Remember, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Greek. Hence, there will always be some minor wording differences when Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament.

## We proclaim Christ crucified

- **And because Jews demand a sign and Greeks search for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, it is truly to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness** (First Corinthians 1:22-23).

The Jews often demanded a sign from Jesus. Here is one passage about it: **“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).

The Jews wanted Jesus to prove himself with something spectacular, probably like what Elijah did when he challenged the prophets of Baal. Here is the sign from God that Elijah gave to the people of Israel: **“Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know**

that thou, Jehovah, are God, and *that* thou have turned their heart back again. Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. And they said, Jehovah, he is God, Jehovah, he is God” (First Kings 18:37-39).

Nevertheless, in spite of that powerful sign, the hearts of the people were not turned back to Jehovah. For not long afterward Elijah was forced to flee to a distant mountain cave to save his life. Jehovah spoke to him there. Here is part of that story: “**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.**” Here is part of what Jehovah replied to him: “**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).

Jesus gave many greater and more powerful signs by all of his miracles of healing. But that was not enough for the Jews, and it is still not enough. The very fact that the Son of God was crucified is a stumbling-block to them. They could not conceive of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, being a poor carpenter turned teacher who was crucified.

The ancient Greeks were renown for their wisdom. And they are still venerated by modern scholars. Men like the ancient Greeks think they can find the answers to the great questions of existence through wisdom. Therefore, the idea that the great questions of existence are answered through the preaching of a crucified man is to them foolishness. That is what the ancient Greeks thought, and it still is for modern scholars.

## Christ the power and wisdom of God

- **But to them, to the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men** (First Corinthians 1:24-25).

We who love God are the called, called to him to become his sons for eternity. God only calls those who love him, his truth, and his righteousness. Not all men love him, and he does not call them to him. What ruler would be so foolish as to invite treacherous rebels to live as princes in his palace? For God has called us to be princes in his palace in heaven.

Power is the ability to perform, while wisdom is knowing how to perform successfully. Paul said that Christ was both the power of God and the wisdom of God. That means Christ is the expression of God’s power and wisdom.

The apostle John spoke of that about Christ, when he said, “**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. In him was life, and the life was the light of men**” (John 1:1-4). And Jesus said to his apostles during the time of the last supper, “**All things, as many as the Father has are mine**” (John 16:15).

The Jews saw Jesus as a weak and foolish man, even claiming he served the devil and was demon possessed (see Matthew 12:24 and John 8:48). And the unbelievers of the world still see him as weak and foolish. For they reject the things he taught, as well as his claim that he was the Son of God.

Paul said **“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men.”** I believe the weak thing of God is the form of a man that he has taken. He took on that form temporarily so that we could better identify with him as our heavenly Father. Nevertheless, that “weak thing of God” is only relative to the infinite power of his normal form. I speak much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

An example of the foolishness of God being wiser than men, is how he could justify forgiving the sins of those who love him, but not the sins of those who hate him, all without being partial. Indeed, even the agents in heaven did not know how God was going to solve that apparent dilemma. For Peter said, **“To whom it was revealed, that they were serving not themselves, but you, those things that were now reported to you by those who preached good news to you in the Holy Spirit, which was sent forth from heaven, into which things agents longed to stoop to see”** (First Peter 1:12).

Paul said it was a mystery hidden from the ages: **“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 ...”** (Ephesians 3:8-11).

God even did that seeming impossibility through what seemed to be a defeat, what seemed to be something foolish. He used the crucifixion of Christ to enable him to redeem all who belong to Christ, so that God could justify saving our souls while condemning those who hate him. The crucifixion of Christ even justified casting his great adversary Satan out of heaven (see Revelation 12:9). What seemed to be the foolishness of God was indeed wiser than men, even wiser than all the inhabitants of heaven. Therefore, there is no real foolishness of God.

However, another way to understand what is meant by the foolishness of God is the many weird, bizarre, and almost comical creatures that God has made on the earth and in the sea. It is amazing that some of them can even survive, much less reproduce. In God’s sight those creatures are no doubt foolish things. Yet he made them with amazing wisdom, wisdom that is far beyond men. I give one possible reason why he made them in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

No, there is no real foolishness of God. Nor is there is any real weak thing about God. He seems weak to the world because he does not make his existence obvious, nor does he eliminate evil from the world, even though he claims to be against it. Therefore, they have no fear of him. But even the things they think are weak about him are stronger than men.

Consider his very existence, which many men either deny, or they claim he is indifferent to our lives in the world. However, by keeping himself invisible and allowing evil on the earth God is better able to test our souls. That way each one of us has the opportunity to love his truth and righteousness, or we can love deceit and wickedness. Thus, God can use the choice we make to determine who is worthy to become his sons for eternity. Hence, the apparent weakness of his existence gives him the power to chose the best souls to live with him in heaven as his sons for eternity. And he does it with perfect justice, with no partiality.

## Not many of us are worldly wise, powerful, or eminent

- **For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent** (First Corinthians 1:26).

Paul said that (1) not many were wise according to flesh, (2) not many were powerful, and (3) not many were eminent. And that remains true even today. That means the called of God—those who believe and obey him—are primarily from a minority of the common people of the world.

God gave the world to mankind, but they have given it to the devil. Consequently, the easiest way for men to become wise according to flesh, or powerful, or eminent in the world, is for them to live according to the ways of the world. They must agree and cooperate with its sinful ways, conforming to its values and its standards. Therefore, it is uncommon for disciples of Christ, who reject the sinful ways of the world, to achieve worldly wisdom, power, or eminence.

James spoke about the evils of only being wise according to flesh, when he said, **“But if ye have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast, and do not lie against the truth. This wisdom is not descending from above, but is earthly, world-soul, demonic”** (James 3:14-15).

## God chose low things to defeat high things

- **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 1:27-29).

Paul said that God chose

the foolish things of the world  
 the weak things of the world  
 the common things of the world  
 the disdained things  
 the things that are not

He chose them so that he might (1) humiliate the wise, (2) humiliate the powerful, and (3) make useless the things that are.

What the world considers foolish things, weak things, common things, disdained things, and even things that are not, are things that God has chosen to humiliate the wise and powerful, and make useless the things that are. In the eyes of the world we who belong to Christ are foolish, weak, common, disdained, and are nothing.

Paul told of himself and his co-workers as being that way when he was describing his work for the cause of Christ: **“Giving not one cause of stumbling in anything, so that the ministry may not be criticized, but in everything commending ourselves as helpers of God, in much perseverance, in afflictions, in necessities, in restrictions, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hungerings, in purity, in knowledge, in forbearance, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in non-hypocritical love, in word of truth, in power of God, through the weapons of righteousness of the right hand and of the left, through glory and disrepute, through slander and commendation; as deceitful, and yet true; as unknown, and well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and not put to death; as grieving, but always rejoicing; as poor, but making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”** (Second Corinthians 6:3-10).

Paul said they were in disrepute, slandered; considered deceitful, unknown, dying; they were punished, grieving, poor, and having nothing. Yet he also said they had glory and commendation; they were true, well known, living, not put to death, always rejoicing making many rich, and possessing all things. Paul was contrasting their reputation in the world with their reputation with God.

In the eyes of the world we who belong in the genuine church of Christ are weak and foolish and nothing. But this world is going to be made useless when it is destroyed in the end. And our glories in heaven will humiliate those who were wise and powerful in this world. God is doing those things so that no flesh can boast before him. For pride is a deadly and destructive sin. Indeed, God said about Satan, whom he described as leviathan the mighty dragon, **“He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34).

Dear faithful brother in Christ, if you are a common man disdained by the world; if they think you are weak and foolish; if they consider you so insignificant that you are nonexistent to them, then remember what Paul said about how 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.

Trust him and continue striving to bear fruit for him. Ignore what the world thinks, and focus on what God thinks. For he uses us to humiliate the wise and powerful, and make them useless. Remember the story of Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel. God quickly elevated him from prison to the throne of ancient Egypt, because he always trusted and obeyed God even when everything seemed against him (see Genesis 37-47). And who knows what plans God has for you, both in this life and in the next one.

## Christ became the truly good things for us

- **But ye are his, in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, just as it is written, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord** (First Corinthians 1:30-31).

Not many of us **“are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent.”** Nevertheless, we belong to God in Christ Jesus. In the eyes of the world we are foolish, weak, base, disdained, and nothing to them. But in the eyes of God we are his chosen, chosen through Christ our Lord.

The truth is, God has chosen the very best for himself, not the best in they eyes of the world, but the best in his eyes. For we are the most righteous souls in the world. We have the best heart and spirit. In terms of spiritual things we are the best in the world. And in heaven we will be the best of all things. We will not only be the most righteous, but also the wisest, the strongest, and the most precious and renown. For we will be sons of God for eternity.

And our greatness in the sight of God is because of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He became for us **“wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”** He became for us wisdom from God because he showed us the way of eternal salvation. He became for us righteousness and sanctification, because it is by our faith and obedience that we are sanctified and made righteous before God. We are sanctified and made righteous because he paid the price to take away all our sins. Through Christ we have been made pure and right in the sight of God.

Therefore, **“He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.”** We can only boast in the Lord because it is only through him that we are given eternal salvation. Regarding our having other blessings, Paul said farther in this book, **“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 4:7). Moreover, boasts in worldly things, like wisdom, power, and renown, are vain because we always lose them when we perish.

The passage Paul quoted is in the book of Jeremiah: **“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).

## Paul proclaimed Christ only

- **And I, brothers, when I came to you, came not in eminence of speech or of wisdom proclaiming the testimony of God to you. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, even this crucified man** (First Corinthians 2:1-2).

Paul did not want them to be impressed and awed by him; he wanted them to know about Jesus Christ. Therefore, he would not use eminence of speech or of wisdom when he proclaimed the testimony of God. He wanted the focus to be on Christ, not upon him. It is rare when a man gives a speech that he does not display the eloquence and wisdom he has. For men seek the praise of other men.

However, Paul was so humble and devoted to Jesus Christ our Lord, that he determined to know nothing among them except Christ. That means he determined not to display how

well educated he was, but to proclaim the powerful testimony that God had given him about his Son Jesus Christ.

And what Paul proclaimed about Christ included even telling them that Christ had been crucified. Too often people forget what a disgrace it was for a man to be crucified. It was like being hanged as an evil man. And who ever tries to proclaim the lordship of a man who has been hanged as a criminal? Yet it was necessary for them to learn of his crucifixion if they wanted to know about God's plan for their salvation.

## In weakness, fear, and trembling

- **And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling** (First Corinthians 2:3).

Paul had no worldly power. He was not rich. He had no large following. He was only a poor foreigner in their land. Even more humbling for him was living with them in fear and much trembling. Paul was in constant danger of attack by the Jews. Remember, in Damascus, in Jerusalem, and in many other places the Jews sought to destroy Paul. Who would not fear and tremble if he knew that many men sought to kill him?

Yet Paul had complete trust in God's protection of him. Therefore, he continued to proclaim Christ publicly and boldly until he was driven out wherever he was. Nevertheless, regardless of how courageous we may be in the face of danger, our body is going to fear and tremble. And it takes great strength of will to overcome that natural fear and trembling, and not flee. That is especially true when we are very vulnerable, which Paul always was, having no worldly power.

## Demonstration of the Spirit and of power

- **And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not be in wisdom of men, but in the power of God** (First Corinthians 2:4-5).

One way Paul's speech and preaching was in demonstration of power was through the extraordinary miracles that he performed. Here is how the book of Acts describes it: **"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).

Such miracles were needed during those early years of the church because the books of the New Testament had not yet been written. Now that we have the New Testament testimony such direct demonstrations of the power of God are not needed. The testimony of the New Testament alone is sufficient for us to see (by faith) that demonstration of power, and to develop faith in the good news of Christ.

Remember what Abraham said to the rich man in Hades who pleaded for him to send Lazarus from the dead to warn his brothers: **"If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead"**

(Luke 16:31). If a man will not listen to the testimony of the Bible, no miracle, no demonstration of power, will convince him.

Another way Paul's speech and preaching was in demonstration of power was by his proclaiming the good news of Christ, which he said was the power of God: **"For the message of the cross is of course foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is a power of God"** (First Corinthians 1:18). And he said to the Romans, **"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).

Paul also said his speech and his preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit. And that was done by his manner of living. When the teachings of the good news of Christ are applied to our lives, that demonstrates the Spirit of God in us. For Paul said later in this letter, **"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).

Working together with our own spirit, God's Holy Spirit motivates every Christian to live in a Godly way. That means to have the same qualities of character that he has; to have the mind of Christ by thinking and acting the way he did. We are energized that way, not supernaturally, but through our knowledge of God's will from the Bible, and the feelings of our enlightened conscience.

Paul's demonstration of the Spirit was by the kind of life he lived among them. He showed them love and compassion, kindness and generosity, justice and righteousness. Those are qualities of the Spirit of God. By displaying that kind of spirit we can more successfully convert souls to Christ, because what people need to be drawn to Christ is not only words of logic and human reasoning. What they need is to see the spiritual power and beauty of the Way, the way of life of the good news of Christ.

They need to see how much we his disciples love God and each other. They need to see how much we love truth and righteousness. They need to see how pure and holy it makes us. They need to see how we are living the way Jesus and his early disciples lived. They need to see how living the way of Christ with all of its virtues is vastly superior to any other way of life. Those things collectively are the demonstration of the Spirit.

Perhaps the best description of the qualities of the Spirit that Paul demonstrated is how he described love. Here is how he described that spirit, that magnificent force called love: **"If I speak with the tongues of men and of agents, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a clashing cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And if I dole out all things possessed by me, and if I deliver my body so that I may be burned, and have not love, I benefit nothing.**

**"Love is patient and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not brag, and is not puffed up. It does not behave improperly, does not seek the things of itself, is not made sharp, does not contemplate evil, does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the truth, covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

**"Love never fails. But whether prophecies, they will be abolished, whether tongues, they will cease, whether knowledge, it will be abolished. But we know in part, and we**

**prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, then what is in part will be abolished. 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. For now we see by polished metal, in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know just as also I was known.**

**“And now remain faith, hope, love, these three, but the greater of these is love”** (First Corinthians 13:1-13).

Another excellent example of the demonstration of the Spirit was in the life of Naomi, a Hebrew woman who, with her family, was forced to leave Israel (during Old Testament times) because of a famine. They lived in Moab, and her two sons married Moabite women. After Naomi’s husband and two sons all died there, she was going to return to Israel.

She urged her two daughters-in-law to remain in their homeland because she could do nothing for them. One of them did stay, but Ruth said to her, **“Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee, for where thou go, I will go, and where thou lodge, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts thee and me”** (Ruth 1:16-17).

Ruth saw the beauty and the power of the Spirit of God that was demonstrated in the life of Naomi. And because she loved truth and righteousness so much, she did not want to leave that spirit, which was manifested in Naomi’s way of life. For there is no other spirit in the world that is so beautiful and magnificent, and has such power to enlighten, transform, and beautify the hearts and lives of men to godliness.

Therefore, Paul said our faith should not be founded upon the wisdom of men, but on the Spirit and power of God. Remember what Paul said about the wisdom of men: **“Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world?”** (First Corinthians 1:20). The wisdom of men is transient and vain, but the power of God is eternal. And the power of his Holy Spirit can be seen in the words of the Holy Bible, and in the righteous lives of the faithful disciples of Christ. Our faith is in those things, not in persuasive words of human wisdom.

## Speaking a hidden mystery

- **But we speak wisdom among the fully developed, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who come to nothing. 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 2:6-8).

Paul assures us that God is not disparaging or belittling all wisdom, only the wisdom of this age and of its rulers. He said we (those who proclaim the word of God) speak a wisdom of God among the fully developed. That is, among those who have learned and matured in their knowledge of the word of God, and in the character of their spirits.

As we mature in Christ, learning his will for us and being energized by an enlighten and enlivened conscience, then we can be ready to learn the wisdom of God. Paul said that wisdom of God was in a hidden mystery. A mystery which God predestined before the ages for our glory.

That means before time began, even before he made heaven and earth, God developed the plan for our glory, the glory of becoming his sons for eternity. I speak more about that in my books *King Solomon's Advice for the World* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul said that none of the rulers of this age have known that wisdom. That means they have not understood the mystery of how God is saving our souls and adopting us to be his sons for eternity. Paul said that if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

He said the same thing in a sermon at Antioch of Pisidia, **“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”** (Acts 13:26-27).

Those sinful rulers did not know that wisdom of God because **“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”** (John 12:40). And the eyes of the sinful rulers of this age remain blind, and their hearts remain hardened, so as not to see and understand. For God does not want to heal unrepentant sinners.

## Things God prepared for us

- **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).

Those are also among the most beautiful words ever uttered. No man has ever seen or heard, nor even imagined **“things that God prepared for those who love him.”** Nor will any man ever see or hear or imagine those things until after the great day of judgment. Because then all who belong to his beloved Son Jesus Christ, and only they, will see and hear those things, with no need to imagine them.

The book of Revelation gives us a tiny glimpse of what those things are like from John's symbolic description of the new Jerusalem in heaven, part of which says, **“And the structure of its wall was jasper. And the city was pure gold, similar to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city adorned with every precious stone.**

**“The first foundation was jasper, the second, sapphire, the third, chalcedony, the fourth, emerald, the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl, the ninth, topaz, the tenth, chrysoprase, the eleventh, jacinth, the twelfth, amethyst.**

**“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls apiece, each one of the gates was of one pearl. And the thoroughfare of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass”** (Reve-

lation 21:18-21). Those things were just symbolic, in words we can understand, of the outer part of it.

The passage that Paul quoted is from the book of Isaiah: **“For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, besides thee, *what he has prepared for him who waits for him*”** (Isaiah 64:4). That means even from the times of the Old Testament God has promised those unimaginably wonderful blessings to those who wait for him, meaning those who trust him and his promises for us.

## Disclosed through God’s Spirit

- **But God disclosed to us through his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of the man, except the spirit of the man in him? And so nobody knows the things of God except the Spirit of God** (First Corinthians 2:10-11).

Through his Holy Spirit, God disclosed to us his great plan for our eternal salvation. He disclosed to us how we can become his sons for eternity. He disclosed to us how he has prepared for us a glorious future life in heaven with him. He has disclosed to us many wonderful things of which the world is blind and deaf. And all of those things have been disclosed to us in his Holy Bible, which was written with the hands of chosen men by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

The world sees but does not see; it hears but does not hear. It reads and hears but cannot comprehend. The world, in the sense of understanding and believing, is blind and deaf to what the Spirit of God has disclosed to us. For how could a man be offered eternal life to reign in an incorruptible world of wealth and glory, and scoff about it? How could a man be warned that he was in danger of suffering eternal punishment, and scoff about it? They see but do not see, and they hear but do not hear. For God has hardened the hearts of unrepentant sinners so they cannot see and hear (see Matthew 13:15).

## From the world versus from God

- **But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God** (First Corinthians 2:12).

A spirit is an animating force. And we did not receive the animating force of the world, which energizes them for sin and wickedness. We received the infinitely superior animating force from the Holy Spirit of God, which energizes us for truth and righteousness.

For the spirit of the world is death, but the Spirit from God is life. As Paul said to the Ephesians: **“But God, being rich in mercy, through his great love that he loved us, even us being dead in the transgressions, he made alive together with the Christ (ye are saved by grace), and raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly things in Christ Jesus. So that in the coming ages he might show the transcending wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-7).

We were dead in the transgressions, but God made us alive. And in that life we can know **“the things graciously given to us by God.”** Those things include knowing the meaning and purpose of our lives; knowing how best to please God and to live in the world, knowing how to become sons of God for eternity; knowing about our future glory in heaven. None of which things the unrepentant sinners of the world know or can know.

## Comparing spiritual things

- **Which things also we speak, not in things learned from mankind, in words of wisdom, but in things learned from the Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things** (First Corinthians 2:13).

The words of wisdom learned from mankind are about things of the world. The things taught by Jesus and his apostles (with their co-workmen) were about spiritual things learned from the Holy Spirit. They compared spiritual things with spiritual things, not earthly things. They spoke about God and Christ, about heaven, and about the good news of the Son of God for us.

Every man in the world consists of a body of flesh and an eternal spirit. The words of wisdom about our flesh are learned from mankind. The words of wisdom about our eternal spirit are learned from the Holy Spirit of God through the words of Christ and his apostles, which words have been recorded in the New Testament. And that wisdom compares spiritual things with spiritual things.

It compares our spirits with the spirits of God and of Christ. It compares our spirits on earth with how they will be in heaven. It compares the Spirit of God with the spirits of Satan and his allies. The words of the New Testament are about spiritual things revealed to us by God's Holy Spirit, not things of the world that are learned from mankind.

## The natural man cannot understand

- **Now the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to understand because they are evaluated spiritually. But truly the spiritual man evaluates all things, but he himself is evaluated by none** (First Corinthians 2:14-15).

Natural men are those who have chosen to live only for the things of this world. They do not love and trust God. Indeed, most of them even deny his existence. They live like the beasts of the earth, although with more intelligence and creative powers. They live like the beasts of the earth because they live only to satisfy their earthly nature.

Therefore, since the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, which in the world are primarily seen in the word of God for us, the Holy Bible; he is unable to understand the knowledge and wisdom of it. He cannot understand because they are evaluated spiritually. That means a man must accept the existence of spiritual things, including God, the world of heaven, and our eternal spirits, if he is to understand them.

The natural man denies spiritual things, and considers them to be foolishness. He cannot see them with his eyes. He cannot study them empirically. He cannot see them working in

the world. Therefore, they are foolishness to him, silly superstitions, ridiculous figments of imagination invented by deluded men.

But the spiritual man is more enlightened about reality, because he recognizes the greater existence of spiritual things. He sees the truth of them revealed in the words of our Creator that are recorded for us in the Bible. His eyes are opened to see beyond the mere earthly reality.

Therefore, being able to learn things about both realities, the spiritual and the material, he is able to evaluate all things, all things revealed to us about both realities. Moreover, the spiritual man is evaluated by none. To evaluate means to pass judgment. And we cannot be evaluated and judged by anyone except God himself. For Paul said to his brothers in Rome, **“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).

### Having the mind of Christ

- **For who has known the mind of the Lord that he will stand with him? But we have the mind of Christ** (First Corinthians 2:16).

God’s only begotten Son Jesus Christ alone knows the mind of our Lord God so that he will stand with him. As Jesus said to his disciples, **“All things were delivered to me by my 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).

We know the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, but we know not his mind. Nevertheless, Paul said that we who belong to Christ have the mind of Christ. That means when we repent of our sins, are converted to him, and become begotten again, we forsake thinking like the world, and begin thinking as he thinks and feeling as he feels. We forsake our old fleshly mind and take on his mind of holiness. As 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).

### Division meant they were still carnal

- **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, 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?** (First Corinthians 3:1-4).

Paul rebuked the congregation at Corinth because of their divisions. He could not speak to them as to spiritual, but as to carnal. They were too immature in their spiritual development. He could only speak to them as to the childlike in Christ. In matters of the world they were no doubt mature. But in matters of Christ, they were immature and childlike.

Their spiritual thinking was not developed. It was too carnal, too worldly, and their divisions proved it.

Therefore, Paul gave them milk to drink and not solid food, because they were not yet able. And he said they were not even yet able. Apparently when Paul had been with them he could only teach them the rudiments of the good news of Christ (milk to drink) because they were too spiritually immature. He could not teach them the more advanced spiritual knowledge (solid food) that requires spiritual maturity.

And the envy and strife and divisions among them were evidence they were still carnal, not having developed spiritual maturity. They still walked according to man. They were animated by the spirit of the world, and not by the spirit of Christ.

The Corinthian congregation was divided by those who said they belonged to Paul and those who said they belonged to Apollos. The same kind of foolish divisions are still among most believers in Christ. The various denominations are examples of it: "I am a Catholic, I am a Lutheran, I am a Baptist, I am a Pentecostal." And there is no doubt that Paul, speaking for Christ, would condemn them were he able to speak to us now. He would accuse such believers as being carnal and childlike in Christ:

Yet whenever people hear a man raise his voice to condemn denominationalism they rail at him for his "bigotry and intolerance." They stop their ears and turn their backs to him. They refuse to listen, and instead they condemn and reject such a man from their fellowship.

Divisions are always caused by disobedience to the commands of Christ, which information is recorded for us in the New Testament. When men study the word of God and humbly submit to what it says, then they will become united. It is the carnal spirit that keeps men divided. It keeps them from strict obedience to the word of God. Their detrimental traditions, their emphasis on tolerance, their weak understanding of the Bible, setting up one man as a leader over them telling them what to believe and what to do, are things that cause separate denominations among them. And their carnal spirit deludes them into thinking different denominations are acceptable to God.

### Planting, watering, causing growth

- **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).

Every man who works in the kingdom of God is a helper of Christ, regardless of how talented he may be. Each man who works in the kingdom of God contributes his part to the whole. During their generation Paul performed his part, Apollos performed his part, but it was God who caused the growth.

Moreover, no man can be a helper unless the Lord gives to him. That means God is the ultimate source of all our abilities and our resources. He gives to us and it is our duty to use what we have been given wisely so that we can be fruitful in his service. But regardless of how much the Lord gives, he is the one who causes growth.

Therefore, as disciples of Christ we must not call ourselves by any man, nor commit ourselves to any man, nor set any man over us. Each disciple is free to oversee his own service to Christ. And each congregation is to have elder men (plural) appointed to oversee their work. Paul gives instructions about appointing elders in his first letter to Timothy and in his letter to Titus.

Nevertheless remember, Jesus said no man was to lord over us the way rulers of the world do (see Matthew 20:25-27). Yet it was not long before many believers began to set a ruler of that kind over them. For example, soon after the time of the apostles, aggressive men among the congregations created an office call Bishop. And then they began elevating the bishop above all others, saying such things as, “It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord himself, standing, as he does before the Lord,”<sup>1</sup> and, “It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize, or to offer, or to present sacrifice, or to celebrate a love-feast. But that which seems good to him [the bishop], is also well-pleasing to God, that everything ye do may be secure and valid.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus warned about such things happening, when he said, “**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). Men not only treat the churches of Christ aggressively, but aggressive men (most commonly men within them) continually strive to seize control of his disciples, and they often succeed because weak believers like it that way.

### Each according to his own labor

- **Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each man will receive his own payment according to his own labor** (First Corinthians 3:8).

When Paul said “**he who plants and he who waters are one,**” he meant we were one in Christ Jesus, united in his body, the church. However, he also said “**each man will receive his own payment according to his own labor.**” That means, although we are one in Christ, we are still independent in our labors and the fruits of them. If I work more diligently and succeed more than some another disciple, then I will receive more benefits from that labor. For “**each man will receive his own payment according to his own labor.**” The church is not a communist system.

### We are co-workmen of God

- **For we are co-workmen of God. Ye are a tillage of God, an edifice of God. According to the grace of God that was given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation and another man is building on it** (First Corinthians 3:9-10).

A tillage is cultivated land prepared for crops. An edifice is a building prepared for functionality. Therefore, we are co-workmen of God prepared to bear fruit for his kingdom, each according to the grace of God given to him. Paul was a master builder who laid a

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1. Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians

2. Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrneans

foundation, which another man builds upon. Of course, that symbolizes the work of Paul establishing new congregations, leaving other men to develop them afterward. Paul's other work was in writing holy scriptures about the good news of Christ. And our duty is to apply that and other scriptures to our lives.

### No other foundation but Christ

- **But let each man take heed how he is building on it. For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ** (First Corinthians 3:10-11).

Paul warns us to be careful how we build upon the foundation, because Christ is the only legitimate foundation. When Paul said he laid a foundation, that means when he began a new congregation he produced in them faith in Christ and the fundamentals of obedience, now taught in the Holy Bible. That is the foundation upon which every good work must be based—knowledge of and obedience to the commands of Christ. In order to bear fruit for righteousness, every man must believe and obey our Lord Christ.

Without that foundation a man's works serve the cause of the world and not the Lord. Such a man may do some good works, but those works do not contribute to the cause of Christ. Remember what Jesus said about being with him: **"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters"** (Matthew 12:30).

### Building upon the foundation

- **And if any man builds upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become manifest. For the day will make it known, because it is revealed by fire. And the fire will test each man's work of what kind it is** (First Corinthians 3:12-13).

The materials that Paul listed for building upon the foundation of Christ symbolize how we use our lives in righteous labor. The products of a man's life depend both upon the resources he has and how he uses them. The things men produce vary enormously, ranging from rearing children to constructing great edifices; from changing the hearts of people to creating new ideas. Nevertheless, every man must base his life upon the foundation of Christ—upon faith in and obedience to him—whether his works are of a humble and lowly kind, or are very precious and valuable.

When Paul said **"each man's work will become manifest,"** he was referring to the consequences of it. When he said, **"the day will make it known, because it is revealed by fire,"** what he meant was that time and circumstances will reveal how successful it is, because time and circumstances will subject it to various kinds of testing, which include the stresses and tribulations that are a natural part of this world. Remember what Paul said about our world: **"For we know that the whole creation is groaning and travailing together until now"** (Romans 8:22).

Therefore, **"the fire will test each man's work of what kind it is."** The fire symbolizes the stresses and tribulations of the world. Those things test our work, revealing whether our work succeeds or fails in being constructive.

Remember the parable of Jesus about the two houses: **“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).

Therefore, **“let each man take heed how he is building”** the things in his life. Be wise in everything that you do, because everything we do has consequences of some kind.

Nevertheless remember, there are often circumstances beyond our control that determine how successful we are in our endeavors. For example, consider this proverb: **“Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is that is consumed because of injustice”** (Proverbs 13:23). Paul says more about that next.

### Work remains or burned

- **If any man’s work that he built on will remain, he will receive benefit. If any man’s work will be burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but so as through fire** (First Corinthians 3:14-15).

Whatever things we have achieved in our lives that succeed and remain will give us benefits. However, for some men the things they achieve fail (are burned), which cause them to suffer loss. That often happens during wartimes and other great disasters, but it can happen in many other ways.

Solomon gave an example of such loss, when he said, **“There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches were kept by the owner of it to his hurt. And those riches perish in a bad venture. And if he has begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand”** (Ecclesiastes 5:13-15).

Nevertheless, Paul said, such a man can still be saved, but so as through fire. That means when the work of a man fails and he suffers loss, he will still be saved for eternity. Nevertheless, his failure in his work will be like fire, painful and destructive.

During the time when the righteous man Job was oppressed by Satan, Job’s failure in all his work—the loss of all his sons, his wealth, and even his health—were as through fire to him. Nevertheless, Job never lost his favorable standing with God because he never lost faith in him. And after his suffering God blessed him such that his later work did succeed and remain.

Therefore dear brother in Christ, take heart and be not distressed about your soul’s salvation when your labors on earth fail. As long as we remain faithful to the Lord he has guaranteed our salvation.

## We are a temple of God

- **Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy this man, for the temple of God is holy, which ye are** (First Corinthians 3:16-17).

There will never be another temple of God built in Jerusalem or anywhere else in the world. The Bible does speak of a temple of God in heaven (see Revelation 11:19). However, on the earth we are now a temple of God. Collectively we the disciples of Christ comprising the church are a temple of God because the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us.

Remember what Jesus said about being able to see the kingdom of God: **“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). Also remember how Jesus spoke of that to his apostles during 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 of God.

Therefore, any man who destroys any of us will himself be destroyed by God. And the book of Hebrews warns, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31).

Paul said, **“the temple of God is holy, which ye are.”** The temple of God is where his Spirit resides, and on the earth it now resides in his church. And since the temple of God is holy, therefore we the genuine members of the church of Christ are holy because his Spirit dwells in us. Just being aware of that should make us all the more eager to keep ourselves and the church pure from the sins of the world. We should continually strive to make our thoughts, our words, and our behavior always good and right in his sight. And that is something we will all struggle with as long as we are in the flesh. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Become foolish to become wise

- **Let not one man deceive himself. If any man among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become foolish so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, He who catches the wise in their craftiness, and again, The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are vain** (First Corinthians 3:18-20).

Paul did not say we should all become foolish so that we may become wise. He said, **“If any man among you seems to be wise in this age ... .”** Paul was speaking about men among us who seem to be wise in this age. Paul said that if any man among us thought himself wise in this age, or if he gave that impression, then he should **“become foolish so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.”**

Such a man should become foolish in the sense of realizing that in the sight of God the wisdom of this world is foolishness. God has so made the world that men cannot under-

stand it fully. Their wisdom about the world will always be primitive and incomplete. For Solomon said, **“I have seen the travail which God has given to the sons of men to be employed therewith. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also he has set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end”** (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11).

Therefore, if any man among us seems to be wise in this age, he should confess that such wisdom is **“foolishness before God,”** because worldly wisdom is indeed foolishness, foolishness before God. And realizing that will make a man wise. The foolishness (in the eyes of the world) of believing in Christ enables a man to become wise, wise in realizing the foolishness of the wisdom of this age, and in knowing the truth about God and reality.

Paul’s first quotation in that passage is from the book of Job. The words are those of Eliphaz the Temanite, one of Job’s three friends, who said, **“He takes the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning is carried headlong”** (Job 5:13).

I need to mention that those three men judged Job as being very sinful to deserve such severe suffering. And they spoke many words condemning him. They were wrong, because suffering is not always caused by our own guilt. And after God finally spoke to Job, the record says that God rebuked those three men: **“And it was so, that, after Jehovah had spoken these words to Job, Jehovah said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends. For ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has”** (Job 42:7). Nevertheless, not all of what those men said was wrong. Much of what they said was true. And what Paul quoted was an example of that.

The second passage Paul quoted appears to be from the Psalms, which says, **“Jehovah knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity”** (Psalm 94:11). The words of the psalm say **“the thoughts of man,”** while Paul said **“the thoughts of the wise.”** The thoughts of man include the thoughts of the wise. The psalmist was more comprehensive in judging our thoughts, while Paul focused only on those of the (worldly) wise.

Nevertheless, Jehovah knows that all of our thoughts, including those of the wise, are vanity. For Solomon said both at the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes and at the end of it, **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8). Our thoughts are vanity because of the great limitation of our ability to know and understand. As Paul said later in this book, **“For now we see by polished metal, in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know just as also I was known”** (First Corinthians 13:12).

## Boast not in men

- **Therefore let not one man boast in men** (First Corinthians 3:21).

In the first part of this book Paul had rebuked the Corinthians for saying, **“I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.”** Those who said they were of Paul or of Apollos or of Cephas were boasting in men, and Paul commanded against it. No man should boast in men because no man is worthy of it. Remember what he said about boasting: **“He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord”** (First Corinthians 1:31).

## All things are yours and ye are Christ's

- **For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's** (First Corinthians 3:21-23).

All things are ours because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. And Paul said about God, **"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?"** (Romans 8:32).

God created all things because he wanted to beget sons to love and share life with him. For James said about God, **"Having deliberated, he begot us by the word of truth for us to be a certain first fruit of his creatures"** (James 1:18). And John said, **"Beloved, we should love each other. Because love is of God, and every man who loves has been begotten of God, and knows God"** (First John 4:7). That means all things were created for us who belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul listed several things that he said were part of all things that are ours. He named himself, Apollos, and Cephas. Those men are ours because they worked for our salvation. The world is ours because Jesus said, **"Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth"** (Matthew 5:5). Exactly how that will happen we can only conjecture.

Paul said that both life and death are ours. We can certainly see how life is ours, because Jesus has promised to us eternal life with him in heaven. How death is ours may be understood by what Paul said about our need to die in order for us to be resurrected to heaven: **"But some man will say, How are the dead raised, and with what kind of body do they come? Thou foolish man, what thou sow is not made alive unless it dies.**

**"And what thou sow, thou do not sow the body that it will become, but a bare grain, if it may happen of wheat, or of some other kind. But God gives it a body as he wills, and to each of the seeds its own body.**

**"All flesh is not the same flesh, but one of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fishes, and another of birds, and heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies (but the glory of the heavenly is different, and the glory of the earthly is different), another glory is of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory.**

**"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in the perishable, it is raised in imperishability. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power"** (First Corinthians 15:35-43).

Paul said that things present and things coming are ours, but he did not say that things in the past are ours. Things present and things coming (the future) can be changed, but the past can never be changed. Some things that have been done in the past can be undone in the sense of changing them to be similar to what they were. But that is merely using the present to make what was similar to the past.

Things present and things coming are ours because God made the world and all the natural laws of it so that **"all things work together for good to those who love God, who are**

**the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28). I explain how that is possible in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

## Managers of God’s mysteries

- **Thus let a man regard us as of helpers of Christ, and managers of mysteries of God. And beyond that, it is sought in managers that any man should be found faithful** (First Corinthians 4:1-2).

Paul, the other apostles, and their co-workmen were all helpers of Christ. He was their Lord whom they served. They were also managers of mysteries of God because they proclaimed and preserved the truth about those mysteries, mysteries like the true nature of God, the meaning and purpose of our lives, how to please God, and how we can become sons of God for eternity.

In another sense, however, Paul could have been speaking about every disciple when he said we should be regarded as helpers of Christ, and managers of mysteries of God. We are all the helpers of Christ because we serve and obey him, working to spread his message of good news and to build up his church. It can also be said that we are managers of mysteries of God because we too proclaim and preserve the truth about those mysteries. **“Therefore let not one man boast in men.” “He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.”**

And even more, **“beyond that,”** Paul said, **“it is sought in managers that any man should be found faithful.”** Managers are men who supervise, direct, regulate, and command. They are given authority over whoever they manage. That means the character of their spirit is especially important. And a major part of that is their faithfulness.

Several time Jesus told how we will be judged by how faithfully we manage what God has given us. Here is only one example: **“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.**

**“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 24:45-51).

## Being appraised

- **But it is a very small thing to me that I might be appraised by you or by a day of mankind. Yet neither do I appraise myself, for I know nothing on myself. Yet I have not been made righteous in this, but he who appraises me is the Lord** (First Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul said that being appraised by those disciples in Corinth or by any man was a very small thing to him. His faith and confidence was in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was for

him that Paul lived his life. Therefore, being appraised well by Christ was the only thing that was important to Paul. And that should be true of us all.

Regarding a day of mankind, that appears to refer to any time a man is judged by men. Remember, the day of the Lord is the end of the world when all men will be judged by him (see for example Second Peter 3:10).

Paul said that he did not even appraise himself. He did not appraise himself because he knew nothing that he should be judged about. Nevertheless, he said that did not make him righteous. Knowing nothing about himself that he should be judged did not excuse him from possible guilt. It is the Lord Jesus who appraised him. And not him only but us all.

Therefore, let no man be overconfident about his righteousness. Our appraisal of ourselves does not make us righteous. For Solomon said, **“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the hearts”** (Proverbs 21:2). And Paul said farther in this book: **“Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall”** (First Corinthians 10:12).

## Judge not before the time

- **Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make public the deliberations of the hearts. And then praise will come to each man from God** (First Corinthians 4:5).

When Paul said we should not judge anything before the time, we should not take that literally. For Jesus himself said to the Jews, **“And also why do ye not judge yourselves what is right?”** (Luke 12:57). And Paul said farther in this book, **“But now I write to you not to associate if any man who is called a brother is a fornicator, or a greedy man, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a predator, not even to eat with such kind. For what is in me to also judge those outside? Do ye not judge those inside? But God judges those outside. And ye yourselves shall drive out the evil man from you”** (First Corinthians 5:11-13).

When Paul said not to judge anything before the time he meant not to pass final judgment on anyone about anything. For when the time (of the great judgment) comes, then the Lord **“will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make public the deliberations of the hearts.”** All things will be revealed on that day.

The hidden things of darkness will be revealed so they can be judged openly. Moreover, the deliberations of our hearts, those hidden things within us, will be made public. Remember those words when you are tempted to do things, or even think things, that are not right. Because everything will be exposed on the day of judgment, even the hidden things of darkness, and even the deliberations of the hearts, our very thoughts.

Our every thought, word, and deed will be brought to light and judged. God will praise the good things, and condemn the evil things. That is probably what Paul meant when he said that praise would come to each man when the Lord comes. Even unrepentant sinners will receive praise for whatever good they did. Nevertheless, the praise they receive will not

save them from the condemnation of their sins, because they will receive eternal punishment for the evil they did. Our salvation is only through our faith in Christ.

## Be not puffed up over each other

- **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** (First Corinthians 4:6).

Paul said he applied those lessons (about not boasting in men, and not making comparisons among themselves) to himself and Apollos for their sakes. Then he gave two reasons, saying to them first, **“so that in us ye might learn not to think above that which is written,”** and second, **“so that ye may not be puffed up, one over the one against the other.”**

What Paul meant by **“that which is written,”** probably refers to the Bible standard. We should not think above, or set standards above what the Bible teaches about righteousness. That means we should not judge each other according to the standards of the world.

For example, favoritism is commonly used in the world, but James condemned using it: **“My brothers, ye should not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, in favoritism. For if a man with a gold ring in bright clothing comes into your synagogue, and also a poor man in dirty clothing comes in, and ye have regard for the man wearing the bright clothing, and say to him, Sit thou here well, and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit here below my footstool, then are ye not partial among yourselves, and become judges from evil thoughts?”** (James 2:1-4).

Paul also condemned being puffed up, one man over another man against another man. Paul was referring to men who both exalt themselves over other disciples, and also strive against other disciples. That is a morbid and sinful kind of competition within the church, which creates divisions and not unity. It is a symptom of envy and selfish ambition.

James also spoke of that, when he said, **“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show from his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast, and do not lie against the truth. This wisdom is not descending from above, but is earthly, world-soul, demonic. For where envy and selfish ambition are, there is instability and every evil deed”** (James 3:13-16).

## Who makes thee different

- **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 4:7).

God is he who makes us different. He made me a man, he made me a citizen of America, he gave me countless opportunities that millions of other men did not have. Every blessing

we have ultimately comes from him. I explain much more about how that happens in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

And since he makes us different and gives us everything, then how can any man boast as if not having received? Only the ignorant and the faithless would boast about having exalted himself, and boast about having acquired what he has by his own power alone.

Paul was later forced to boast about himself to the Corinthians because of the deceitful men who had come among them, boasting that they too were apostles (see Second Corinthians 11). However, Paul's boasting was about the many blessings and commendations he had received from the Lord. He also said about boasting, **"But he who boasts should boast in the Lord. For he who commends himself, that man is not approved, but whom the Lord commends"** (Second Corinthians 10:17-18).

### Ye are already filled and rich

- **Already ye are filled. Already ye have become rich. Ye reigned without us, and O that ye did indeed reign, so that we also might reign with you** (First Corinthians 4:8)

In that passage Paul was speaking about spiritual things. The hearts and minds of the Corinthian disciples were already filled and become rich with spiritual blessing. Consider these words that Paul said to the elders at Ephesus when he was on his way to Jerusalem: **"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).

Paul probably spent more time in Corinth than he did in Ephesus. And since he did all of those things while he was at Ephesus, there is no doubt he did at least as much in Corinth. Therefore, the disciples at Corinth were filled and became rich, filled and rich with knowledge and understanding about the word of God.

That knowledge enabled them to live royally before God. They were able to live as his sons for eternity, future princes of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Hence, they reigned as the chosen of God. They will also reign over the earth, because, when speaking of heaven, the book of Revelation says, **"And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou wert killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth"** (Revelation 5:9-10).

However, we do not yet reign fully. Indeed, Jesus himself does not yet reign fully. For the book of Hebrews says about 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 2:7-8).

The sinners of the world are not yet subordinated to him, but the time will come when they will be forced to be subordinate. And since we will reign with Christ, then we do not yet reign fully. We reign now in the sense of the power of our prayers to God enabling us control some things, controlling by his subtle and hidden powers. We reign the way princes reign through the power of their king.

That is what Paul meant by first saying, **“Ye reigned without us,”** then saying, **“O that ye did indeed reign.”** Paul knew they were princes of God, reigning through Christ. But he also knew that not all things were yet subordinated. And that is what he hoped would happen: **“O that ye did indeed reign.”**

## God exhibited the apostles least

- **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** (First Corinthians 4:9).

The Lord Christ chose his apostles to be his chief representatives, ambassadors for him, and he gave them the highest authority. And yet God exhibited them least. They were exhibited as men sentenced to die. They became a spectacle to the world, both to agents in heaven and to men on the earth. They were chosen by the Lord to be the highest of men on the earth, but he made them appear to be the lowest, even as men sentenced to die.

The Lord made them appear that way to the world, but not to his faithful disciples, who held them in high esteem. For example, the book of Acts says, **“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).

Their fellow Christians honored them. But the world hated and persecuted them more than any other men. The world wanted them dead, whether legally or illegally. The apostles lived constantly, not only with the threat of imprisonment and execution, but also of assassination. The record describes more of those things with Paul, but all of the apostles suffered that way. Remember how James the brother of John was executed by Herod.

They became a spectacle because of the extraordinary way they lived. They went about as poor men refusing to be paid for their astonishing works of healing. They were honored and obeyed by the other Christians, but they were mocked and hated by the world.

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus was seen as a spectacle, mourned by his few disciples (and by the agents in heaven) but ridiculed by the world. His enemies watched it happening with a kind of morbid pleasure. For they mocked him and shouted insults against him during that time of his great suffering (see Matthew 27:39-44).

## Foolish, weak, disreputable

- **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** (First Corinthians 4:10).

The apostles were seen as foolish to the world because they were promoting Christ. They were seen as foolish because the world thought they were wasting their lives promoting a dead criminal, a crucified man. As Paul said, **“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, even this crucified man. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling”** (First Corinthians 2:2-3).

Paul said they were weak and disreputable. They were indeed weak and disreputable in the eyes of the world. And in the next passage Paul gives a vivid description of how weak and disreputable they were: hungry, thirsty, ill clothed, treated roughly, homeless.

In contrast the other disciples were wise in Christ, strong, and esteemed. Having been well taught by the apostles, the other disciples had much knowledge and understanding of Christ and his good news of salvation. Remember what Paul said about the Corinthians: **“Already ye are filled. Already ye have become rich.”** They were filled and rich with spiritual things, and became wise in Christ.

The disciples were strong and esteemed. That means relative to the apostles the other disciples were stronger and more esteemed in the eyes of the world. They were stronger and more esteemed because they had not become such a spectacle the way the apostles had. They were like the disciples who watched Jesus being crucified. They were not mocked, ridiculed, and insulted by the other observers. Nor did the chief priests and the Roman soldiers treat them cruelly the way they had to Jesus.

## Became as trash of the world

- **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 4:11-13).

Here is the list of those ten things that Paul said they suffered:

- Hunger
- Thirst
- Ill clothed
- Treated roughly
- Homeless
- Toil, working with their own hands
- Being reviled, they blessed
- Being persecuted, they endured
- Being slandered, they entreated
- Became as trash of the world, an offscouring of all things

Their hunger, thirst, poor clothing, homelessness, and toiling with their own hands were all caused by their poverty and their frequent missionary travels. Being treated roughly was a part of their frequent persecutions.

When they were reviled, they blessed. For Jesus said, **“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).

When they were persecuted, they endured. They endured because Jesus said, **“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).

When they were slandered, they entreated. They were not defeated by slander. They continued to entreat souls to believe and obey Jesus Christ. They trusted that the truth would have the eventual victory and expose the accusations against them as slander.

There are two examples recorded in the book of Acts when Paul and his co-workmen were slandered. The first time was in Antioch of Pisidia: **“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.**

**“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.**

**“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. And hearing this, the Gentiles were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed for eternal life believed”** (Acts 13:43-48).

The second time was in Corinth: **“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).

The apostles and their co-workmen were considered trash of the world because they were rejected and unwanted. The world considered them an offscouring of all things because they were often expelled from communities and driven away.

Yet in the sight of God they were great treasures to be protected and preserved. They were his own precious sons, the very royalty of heaven. And not them only, but all who strive to serve our Lord Jesus Christ regardless of how much the world may hate us.

## Warning you as beloved children

- **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).

Paul could refer to himself as a spiritual father to them, in the sense of having “begotten” them by converting them to Christ. Paul never married, and consequently never had any children. He brought no new souls into the world, but by bringing new souls into the church he did have children in that sense, spiritual children. Hence, he looked upon those whom he had converted to Christ as his beloved children, begotten through the good news.

Paul said that even though they had countless instructors in Christ, he was the only one who led them into Christ’s church. Therefore, they had a very special relationship with him. And for Paul it was such a close relationship that he looked upon them as their father, a spiritual father, having begotten them through the good news.

Nevertheless, Paul never wanted to be designated a father of them. Remember what Jesus said about designating a father of them: **“And do not designate a father of you upon the earth, for one is your Father, he in the heavens”** (Matthew 23:9). Paul was their father only in the sense of being the man who brought them into the church.

Nobody ever called him, Father Paul. Nobody ever called Peter, Father Peter. The apostles were never given the title of “father,” nor were they ever addressed as “reverend.” Nor does the Bible say anything about making distinctions like clergy and laity. The elders of the congregations were not even designated with such a title. They were never called elder this man or elder that man. Each Christian addressed the other as brother.

All such titles and distinctions were created against the commands of Christ. They were created by aggressive men who wanted to be exalted above other believers. Speaking about such men, Paul said to the brothers at Galatia, **“They are zealous for you but not honorably. They want to exclude you, so that ye may be zealous for them”** (Galatians 4:17). Like many modern politicians, they were zealous about the people, but for the purpose of gaining power over them.

Paul besought them as his beloved children to become followers of him. He wanted them to follow him because he was an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as such he was guiding them into the way of salvation.

### Timothy will remind them

- **Because of this I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every congregation** (First Corinthians 4:17).

Timothy was one of the most useful and faithful of Paul’s helpers. Barnabas was the first co-workman with Paul, and he is mentioned twenty-nine times in the Bible, twenty-four of which are in the book of Acts and those were before he and Paul separated.

Timothy is mentioned twenty-four times in the Bible, six of which are in the book of Acts. Most of the references to Timothy are like this one in the book of First Corinthians. Paul’s relationship with Barnabas was more like two brothers. Paul’s relationship with Timothy was like a father to a son, as the passage here shows.

However, there was never any partiality or favoritism with Paul. He had a fatherly relationship with Timothy because of the kind of young man Timothy was to him. Timothy earned Paul's special affection for him. Peter, James, and John also seemed to have a closer relationship with Jesus, but not because of partiality. They earned it from him by their faith and their actions. Therefore, if you want to have a closer relationship with the Lord, then strive for it. And study the word of God to show you how.

Notice how Paul said that Timothy would remind them of his ways in Christ. And he added that those ways were the same as what Paul taught in every congregation. Paul was completely impartial in all that he did, whether with individuals or with congregations. If you want to see an example of how the Lord responds differently (but impartially) to different congregations, then read the different messages he sent to the seven congregations of Asia. That information is recorded in the first part of the book of Revelation.

When Paul mentioned his ways in Christ, which he said he taught everywhere in every congregation, he was no doubt referring to how he taught by both word and deed. For when we behave properly that is a powerful lesson to others about what it is like to be a disciple of Christ. Paul's manner of living was a very helpful way to teach besides what he said and wrote. Consider what Peter said about wives: **"Likewise the wives, being subordinate to their own husbands, so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they will be gained without a word by the behavior of the wives, observing, in fear, your pure behavior"** (First Peter 3:1-2).

Paul sent Timothy to remind them. We all need reminding because of the natural tendency to forget. And remember, they did not have the New Testament scriptures as we now have. They may have had a few copies of some of the books, but most people of that time were illiterate. The Bible even says that Peter and John were illiterate men (see Acts 4:13). Moreover, books were all hand written, and consequently very expensive. We should all rejoice and thank God that we have the Bible so readily available and inexpensive. And it behooves us to use the Bible to keep ourselves continually reminded of the word of God.

### Coming not in word but in power

- **But as of me not coming to you, some men are puffed up. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord should will, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power** (First Corinthians 4:18-20).

Few people realize that Paul had enemies in the church as well as those outside in the world. An example of that are the men who were puffed up and disputed Paul's claim that he was coming to see them. Those men were obviously envious of Paul, and wanted to undermine his credibility with the disciples. Thus, they used the occasion of his delay to plant seeds of doubt about him.

Remember the parable the Lord gave about an enemy who sowed tares among the wheat. When the bondmen asked if they should gather the tares out of the wheat, the house-ruler 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 13:29-30).

The elders of the congregations are commanded to enforce faithfulness by chastening the disobedient. Paul gives an example of that after the next passage. However, there are hypocrites and other unworthy men scattered among various congregations of the Lord who do not sin sufficiently to warrant being chastened by the elders. They are like the tares among the wheat. And those were apparently the kind of men who were puffed up against Paul at Corinth.

Paul assured the brothers at Corinth that he would come to them shortly. However, he also qualified his promise by saying, **“if the Lord should will.”** And we too should remember that our plans are always contingent upon the Lord’s will. And it is good for us to remind others of that when we speak of the future. Not meaning, of course, that we are commanded to say it every time.

Paul said that when he came he would know, not the word of those who were puffed up, but the power. Then he said, **“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”** What he obviously meant was that the kingdom was not in word only, because words only are easy. The kingdom of God is in power, which is difficult. It is God’s power that verifies his word.

The Holy Spirit of God gave the apostles and many of the disciples special gifts of supernatural power. Paul was able to speak in tongues, he was able to heal the infirm and cast out evil spirits, and he was able to perform other signs and wonders. Remember how he blinded the sorcerer who opposed him (see Acts 13:8-11). Those things were proof that God was with him, and not with those men who were puffed up.

Now, however, our verification as authentic disciples of Christ is from the word of God itself, the Holy Bible, not from supernatural powers, because they are no longer given. They are no longer given because they are no longer needed. The word of God itself is sufficient.

## A rod or love and meekness

- **What do ye want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?** (First Corinthians 4:21).

When Paul asked them if he should come to them with a rod, it was not an idle threat. He had the power of God with him. Remember, he even struck the sorcerer who opposed him with temporary blindness. Consider also this passage from the book of Hebrews: **“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). Paul could indeed have come to them with a rod, the rod of the Lord.

However, there is no doubt Paul much preferred to come to them in love and a spirit of meekness. For he truly did love them, even as a father loves his children. And he certainly wanted to show that love to them with loving kindness instead of a rod.

He also wanted to come to them in a spirit of meekness. Meekness does not mean weakness. Remember what Jesus said 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. For my yoke is befitting, and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:29-30). Meekness means gentleness, patience, and longsuffering.

### One of them had his father's wife

- **Fornication is actually heard among you, and such fornication that is not even named among the Gentiles, for some man to have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up and did not rather mourn, so that he who committed this deed might be taken away from the midst of you** (First Corinthians 5:1-2).

In modern times the word fornication is primarily used to define sexual intercourse between an unmarried man and woman. However, in the Bible the word is often used in a very general sense about virtually any kind of sin of sex between a man and a woman. An example is in these words that Jesus said: **“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 5:32).

What Paul seems to be saying to the Corinthians is that a disciple among them took his father's wife as his own wife. There is no other record in the entire Bible of a man doing such a thing. And Paul said it was so rare that the Gentiles did not even have a name for it. There is much we could conjecture about the details, but they are unimportant. What the man did was clearly wrong, and Paul rebuked the congregation for being proud of what he did instead of being ashamed.

Paul said they should have mourned and taken the guilty man away from the midst of them. Authorities in governments have the power of life and death. The elders of congregations of Christ have no such authority. They can only rebuke the guilty among them, and withdraw fellowship from the unrepentant. And since Paul next commanded them to withdraw from the man, he must have been unrepentant (although he later did repent).

### Deliver such a man to Satan

- **For I truly, as being absent in the body but present in the spirit, I have already, as though present, judged the man who committed this thing this way. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus** (First Corinthians 5:3-5).

Regarding Paul being present with them in the spirit, remember, the word spirit means energy. For example, when the Bible speaks of a weak or a strong spirit, that refers to how much energy a man has. The energy that activates our thoughts, including our knowledge and memories, is a type of spirit. Therefore, when Paul said he was present with them in spirit, he was referring to their memories of him, which was part of the energy or spirit of

their thinking. Paul was influencing them indirectly when they thought about him. That was how he was present in the spirit.

Also that is how the life of a man who perishes can live on in the hearts of men; his spirit continues to live in them, although of course, not his eternal being, which is his personal spirit that returns to God to await judgment. Their memories of are were a type of energy (spirit) in their minds. I explain the complex nature of spirits in much more detail in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul's decision was that they were **“to deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”** God has allowed Satan some power to afflict us. For in one of Peter's sermons, he said about Jesus, **“... 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 10:38).

It is only by God's protection that we are not all completely destroyed by Satan, because he hates us. Hence, Paul could command the Corinthians to deliver the guilty man to Satan for punishment (for destruction of the flesh). Of course, Paul did not mean the total destruction of his flesh, but only enough to be oppressed. And the purpose of that was to awaken the heart of the man to repent so that he could be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, which is the final day of judgment.

It is sad but true that punishment is often necessary to turn people from sin to righteousness. And sometimes it takes rather severe punishment. Nevertheless, sometimes even that will not work. For Solomon said, **“Though thou should pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him”** (Proverbs 27:22). It all depends upon the character of the man's own spirit. Thank God that fools rarely become Christians, at least not while they are fools.

Paul said his command was in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He told them it was by the authority of Christ that he gave that command. He probably needed to emphasize that because he knew it would be very difficult for them to apply such severe punishment. He also told them it should be done when they were gathered together. The whole congregation needed to be informed and involved. Elders should not take such actions in private, which is what leaders of the world commonly do to preserve the illusion of peace and harmony.

My country has become so hostile to Christians, that elders of congregations are now often fearful of expensive lawsuits against them when they publicly announce the withdrawal of fellowship from some member. Yet that does not excuse ignoring that command. Did the apostles quit preaching Jesus when the rulers of their country commanded them against it?

## Purge out the old leaven

- **Your boasting is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 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 5:6-8).

Any sin among us is like leaven in a lump of dough. Tolerating sin, and especially boasting about it, encourages the development of more sins. It is therefore, vitally important to remove sin to prevent sin from spreading. To use another example, sin is like an infection in the body. Unless it is quickly removed it will spread and destroy the body.

When Paul said to purge out the old leaven he was speaking about the leaven of sin, **“leaven of evil and wickedness.”** We are to be a new lump, pure and holy, unleavened by evil and wickedness. We are to live by righteousness, feasting by **“non-leaven of sincerity and truth.”** Paul referred to feasting because he was using the analogy of bread. He also referred to **“non-leaven of sincerity and truth”** apparently in contrast with the **“leaven of evil and wickedness.”** Sincerity and truth must be non-leavened for us just as the bread was in the Passover feast. That unleavened bread was also called the bread of affliction. I say more about that farther on.

Paul told how Christ was our Passover. Remember, the Passover was a feast that was first commanded to be observed by the sons of Israel so that the Lord would pass over them when he took the lives of the firstborn sons in Egypt. Each household was commanded to sacrifice a male lamb for the meal, putting its blood on their door posts, and eating it with unleavened bread (see Exodus 12). That Passover was also later commanded to be celebrated as a memorial of their salvation. As the blood of the lamb on their door posts saved the lives of their firstborn sons, so Christ was our Passover because he was the sacrificial lamb whose blood was shed to save our souls.

Moses soon combined the Passover feast with the feast of unleavened bread, which was to last seven days. Here is part of the commands he gave about 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”** (Deuteronomy 16:3).

Notice how unleavened bread was called **“the bread of affliction.”** It was bread of affliction because their normal bread was leavened, just like ours is. Normal bread is leavened because it is more desirable to eat. Unleavened bread was eaten during Passover because the sons of Israel departed Egypt in haste, without having time to prepare leavened bread. That was one reason it was called bread of affliction.

Therefore, we must follow the steps of our Savior and choose the way of self-sacrifice, eating the bread of affliction, such as the non-leaven of sincerity and truth. Remember what he said to his disciples: **“If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”** (Matthew 16:24).

### Withdraw from a brother who sins

- **I wrote to you in the letter not to associate with fornicators, and not at all with the fornicators of this world, or with greedy men, or with predators, or with idolaters, since then ye would need to go out of the world.**
- **But now I write to you not to associate if any man who is called a brother is a fornicator, or a greedy man, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a predator, not even to eat with such kind** (First Corinthians 5:9-11).

Paul's reference to "the letter" in which he previously commanded them not to associate with fornicators is a great mystery. It probably refers to a lost letter that he wrote to them before this one, although some dispute that. I have yet to find a good explanation. Nevertheless, it is just another fact of trivia that is irrelevant for us. The lesson is that they had not hearkened to his command about sin among them. Just as in our time, those disciples were too tolerant of sin.

The command not to associate with fornicators refers to members of the church, not to sinners of the world. Some translators have perverted the word of God by changing the words of what Paul said. For example, the NAS says "so-called brother," and the NIV says "calls himself a brother." They have changed what Paul said because of their false doctrine of "once saved always saved." They changed it because what Paul said denies that doctrine. Instead of faithfully translating what the Bible says they pervert the scriptures to support their false doctrines.

The above example is just one of many distortions they make. Their greatest sin is presenting their opinions as the genuine word of God. They justify their action by calling it "dynamic equivalent" translating, which is in fact interpretation not translation. Therefore dear reader, beware of what is presented as the word of God. You can read many excellent exposés about such translations on the internet.

Paul generalized his command about fornicators to include greedy men, predators, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards. Which list is merely a few examples he gave of different kinds of sin, because we are not to associate with a Christian brother who is (actively) guilty of any such kind of sin. Paul even commanded against eating with them. That response is one of the few ways we have of punishing disciples. And it is done to encourage their repentance.

Of course, as with most commands we must use good judgment about obeying them. There are many things that some disciples do that are sins of a lesser kind. Such things as smoking, becoming obese because of gluttony, buying lottery tickets, failure of women to have their heads covered in prayer (see First Corinthians 11), spoiling their children, practicing gossip, are not the kind of sins that Paul commanded to withdraw fellowship about. At least not in the modern world, because they are so commonly accepted.

For example, Jesus did not command the death of the woman caught in adultery, although that was the penalty given in the law of Moses. He did not apply it to her because adultery was so common and so rarely punished during that spiritually decadent generation of Jews. You can read more about judging sins in my commentary on John 8.

Nevertheless, even though withdrawing fellowship is not warranted for every sin, it is our duty to "**reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching**" (Second Timothy 4:2) toward every kind of sin both in and around us.

## Judging

- **For what is in me to also judge those outside? Do ye not judge those inside? But God judges those outside. And ye yourselves shall drive out the evil man from you** (First Corinthians 5:12-13).

We have no authority to judge outsiders; God judges them. As Paul said to the brothers at Rome, “... **is written, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord**” (Romans 12:19). And he uses the rulers of the world to punish wrongdoers, for Paul also said: “**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 13:3-4).

However, God has given us the right to judge each other. And that is essential to maintain congregational peace, order, and discipline. As fathers and mothers have the right to judge and punish their disobedient children, so the elders of the congregations have the right to judge and punish those who sin. Remember however, we can only punish each other with words of rebuke, and by excommunication and shunning. Hence, Paul commanded them to drive out the evil man from among them.

### Going to law against each other

- **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? Know ye not that we will judge agents? Then why not mundane things?** (First Corinthians 6:1-3).

Paul next speaks about legal disputes they had with each other. He first asked them five questions about it, one after the other. And each one was a rebuke to them. He rebuked them

- for going to law before the unrighteous and not before the sanctified.
- for not knowing that we the sanctified will judge the world.
- for considering themselves unworthy of judging very small legal disputes.
- for not knowing that we will judge agents.
- for not judging mundane things for themselves.

The main lesson he made was that our personal disputes should be settled among ourselves. We should regard each other as much more worthy of judging than the sinners of the world, especially small disputes about mundane things. For in heaven we are going to judge the world as well as the Lord’s agents there.

Nevertheless, in order for disputes to be judged within congregations, the Spirit of Christ must be strong in the members. Disputants must trust the judgment of other members, and those who are asked to be judges must be confident there will be no adverse repercussions because of decisions they might make. There must be a humble and loving spirit of good will among them.

When Paul said that we, the sanctified of God, will judge both the world and agents he was referring to our status in heaven. For in the book of Revelation, Jesus gave this promise to us: “**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 being enthroned means being given authority to rule and to judge.

Also farther in Revelation, when John was describing the new Jerusalem where we will live for eternity with God and Christ, he said, **“And there will be no curse there. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him. And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads. And there will be no night there, and they have no need of a lamp and the light of sun, because Lord God will illuminate them. And they will reign into the ages of the ages”** (Revelation 22:3-5).

## Using the wrong men to judge

- **Indeed therefore whenever ye have mundane legal disputes, men who are disdained by the church, these ye seat to judge. I speak shame about you** (First Corinthians 6:4-5).

After asking all those questions, Paul now states a fact about them, one that also deserved a rebuke. They chose men who are disdained by the church to judge their legal disputes. Paul was not speaking about any particular men, but all appointed judges who refuse to believe and obey Christ, which is the case for most of them in the world.

When Paul said he was speaking shame about them, that was probably the most stinging rebuke. Yet they not only deserved it, but they needed it to help them repent. It was no doubt very difficult for Paul to say those things, but he said them because he loved them. And he also probably remembered the words of Solomon: **“He who rebukes a man shall afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue”** (Proverbs 28:23). Therefore dear brother, have courage, trust God, and rebuke those you love when they need it.

## Is no man among you able to arbitrate

- **So there is not among you not even one wise man who will be able to arbitrate between his brother? But brother goes to law against brother, and this before unbelievers** (First Corinthians 6:5-6).

Paul asked them if there was not even one wise man who was able to arbitrate between his brother. Like the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees, whichever answer they gave would have condemned them: **“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”** (Matthew 21:25-27).

Paul’s question to the Corinthians was of the same kind. If they said yes, then Paul would have asked why they did not use the man. If they said no, then that would have humiliated them, making them look pathetically inferior.

In that passage Paul gave them another question. He gave them so many questions about this matter because responding to questions requires thinking. And it seemed obvious that they were not thinking about what they were doing. They did not seem to realize all of the bad implications that resulted from their going to unbelievers with their disputes.

Continuing from the example of Paul, I too will ask a few questions to help further illustrate those implications. What does the world think when they see the disciples of Christ put more trust in the justice of unbelievers than in their fellow Christians? Is that good testimony to bring honor to Christ? Would you belong to a group where the members did not trust each other to do right? Then how can believers in Christ go to law to have their legal disputes judged by those who reject Christ?

Therefore, we who belong to Jesus Christ must use each other to settle our differences, unless we are forced to do otherwise because of circumstances beyond our control.

Notice how Paul assumed they would be able to make wise judgments. With mundane matters detailed knowledge of the laws of the land are not required. They did not need to be lawyers or professional judges to make the right decisions. All they needed was a good heart and knowledge of righteousness, including the one in this command: **“And to the man who wants to sue thee, and take away thy coat, thou shall leave him thy cloak also”** (Matthew 5:40).

### Legal disputes are a defeat for you

- **Now therefore it is indeed altogether a defeat for you because ye have legal disputes against yourselves. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? Instead ye do wrong, and defraud, and these things to brothers** (First Corinthians 6:7-8).

There will always be differences among us. It is natural to have differences. Indeed, differences are inevitable. In fact, it is well known that even identical twins have different fingerprints. There is both good and bad in differences. They can either divide us or they can strengthen us. Differences can cause conflicts and strifes, or they can increase organization and development.

Paul said that differences that cause legal disputes are a defeat for them. For legal disputes are a kind of strife. And strife always causes division and ill feelings. Legal disputes involve men using laws against each other. Love is not a part of it, and too often the rigidity of laws does not promote justice. Hence, reliance on laws to settle disputes among us is a defeat. It defeats us by destroying the spirit of love and harmony that should prevail.

Therefore, Paul told them it was better to be wronged; it was better to be defrauded. It was better to suffer some injustice in order to maintain their unity. It was better to turn the other cheek, rather than be divided and quarrel. It was better for them to accept a loss of some worldly thing, rather than to cause sorrow in the body of Christ. God knows how to recompense us when we put him and his kingdom first.

If it is a matter of deliberate wrong and calculated fraud, then that should be punished. The unrepentant man should be driven out of the assembly. But if the dispute is about something that involves honest differences, then go the second mile, and be willing to take a loss for the sake of love and harmony.

Moreover, if a dispute is about matters of the church, the doctrine of Christ, and obedience to him, those things cannot be compromised. We must not allow error to be tolerated, even at the cost of love and harmony. And the elders bear the responsibility to ensure that hap-

pening, just as in the secular world, if we see error it is our duty to report it. But it is the responsibility of the leaders to correct it. For we are all going to be judged by the Lord.

## The unrighteous will not inherit

- **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).**

Paul's next question was to ask them if they knew not that the unrighteous would not inherit the kingdom of God. That was a warning especially to those among them who might be tempted to do wrong and to defraud. In their disputes it is far better to be wronged and be defrauded than to do wrong and to defraud, because the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Doing wrong and defrauding might result in some temporary worldly gains, but at the cost of losing their eternal souls.

Paul warned them not to be led astray. It is better for us to lose a legal dispute than to lose our soul. Therefore, when we have mundane legal disputes, rely upon each other to judge what is right. And whatever is judged right, accept it without complaint, even if you think it is not right. Wait on the Lord for the final judgment.

Paul listed ten examples of sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those were, of course, merely examples, because there are numerous other kinds of sinners who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Among the list that he gave are effeminate men. Women are to be feminine, but not men. In fact, the law of Moses commanded against women even dressing like men and men dressing like women: **“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).

In this perverse and spiritually decadent generation of Americans it is very common to see women dressing like men. Indeed, female government employees like police and soldiers are all dressed exactly like men. The evil of feminism has caused our rulers to outlaw any distinctions between men and women. And so women are treated like men in every way, except when it is impossible. And that evil philosophy has become so pervasive in our country that most if not all of the congregations accept women who dress like men. Female transvestites are very common now.

There is still some disapproval of male transvestites by most people, although they are now protected by the law. This generation has become so perverse that many men have had surgery performed on them to make even their bodies look like women, which has alarmed many women who go to public restrooms.

Paul made it very clear that men who are effeminate, acting like women are among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, even if they do not make themselves appear like them. And dear reader, if you do not yet know the difference between how men and women should act, then you need more than I can explain here. You need to do a lot of

study and research to correct that deficiency in your learning. Dig yourself out of that satanic hole and come up into the light of truth. Notice how Paul separated effeminate men from homosexuals, because not all homosexuals are effeminate.

It is unnecessary for me to explain anything about the other sinners that Paul listed. They are amply defined in most every dictionary. And remember, they are only a sample of the kinds of men who will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those sinners were not listed by Paul because of their special nature; they were a mere sample. Except probably for Paul's mention of effeminate men; such men are not always classified with such sinners as the others.

### Some of you were those things

- **And some of you were these things, but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God** (First Corinthians 6:11).

Paul said some of them were those things, which is true of many modern Christians as well. Those disciples at Corinth repented of their sins and obeyed Christ, which is true of modern Christians as well. And when that happened they were all

washed  
sanctified  
made righteous

They were washed by the blood of Christ. For speaking about him, John said, “... **Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and washed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly**” (Revelation 1:5-6).

Being sanctified means set apart as holy. The disciples of Christ are called the sanctified several dozen times in the New Testament. In his prayer during the last supper Jesus told how he sanctified himself so that we could also be sanctified: “**And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they may also themselves be sanctified in truth**” (John 17:19).

We were made righteous by the great sacrifice of our Lord that enabled him to become our Redeemer. He bought us by paying for our sins, thereby making us righteous. For Paul said a little farther on, “**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).

We were washed, sanctified, and made righteous (1) in the name of the Lord Jesus, and (2) in the Spirit of our God. It is through the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are washed, sanctified, and made righteous; it is through his authority and his alone. And it is in the Spirit of God that we are washed, sanctified, and made righteous. For no man can be washed, sanctified, and made righteous without having the Spirit of God in him. And that happens when we repent and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins.

## All things are lawful but not all expedient

- **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).

Remember, in the original Bible languages (Hebrew and Greek) such words as all, everything, always, and forever, do not have the absolute meaning they have in English. Hence, when Paul said that all things were lawful for him, he did not mean all things absolutely and completely. He did not mean acts of sin and wickedness were lawful for him. He meant the much greater range of things that are not sinful were lawful for him. God was allowing him to do whatever he wanted, within the realm of righteousness.

To illustrate, remember the parable Jesus told about a certain nobleman. 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). Notice how the nobleman gave his bondmen complete freedom to decide for themselves how to do business with the money. Nevertheless, it was understood that they were not free to commit crimes. All things were lawful for them to do business, but only in the realm of what was good, right, and just.

All things were lawful for Paul (within the realm of righteousness), but not all things were expedient. And in the same way, all things are lawful for us (within the realm of righteousness), but not all things are expedient, suitable, helpful, beneficial.

And one of our great challenges in life is to know how to do things that are expedient. For we all sometimes choose things that later prove not to be helpful. That means even though we do things that are lawful for us in the sight of God, they are not always beneficial. Nevertheless, it is not a sin even when our efforts fail. The poor choices we make are allowed (lawful) but not helpful. When disciples of Christ, fail to do things wisely, that does not condemn us, but we will still suffer the consequences of them.

Paul also said that even though all things were lawful for him, he would not be brought under control by anything. What he probably meant was that although we have great freedom of choices within the realm of righteousness, we should not allow anything to take control of our will. We should always do things freely and not by a compulsion or by an impulse that is against our will. Our free will should not be lost by being brought under the control of something else.

## What our body is for

- **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. And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up through his power** (First Corinthians 6:13-14).

Paul is here speaking about how things are to be used properly, and he gave the example of foods. Foods are made for the belly, and the belly was made for foods. Foods are not

something to play with as is commonly done by this spiritually infantile and decadent generation. Food is necessary for us to survive, but the time is coming when God will abolish everything in this world. Therefore, we should not live only for the flesh, but to prepare for when the world is over.

Paul used food as an example for his lesson about fornication. Sexual intimacy is for husbands and wives, and husbands and wives are for sexual intimacy. It is not a marriage without sexual intimacy. Sexual intimacy is for marriage, not something to play with wantonly as is commonly done by this adulterous generation. Things like fornication are playing with sexual intimacy outside of marriage.

Paul said the body is not for fornication. God created sexual intimacy to serve two purposes. First, to bring new souls into the world, and second, to strengthen the marriage bond. The beasts of the earth engage in sexually behavior only at certain times because its only purpose for them is reproduction. However, sexually behavior can be done most of the time with humans, when it is expedient. For example, the law of Moses did outlaw sexual intimacy during a woman's menstrual period, which was called her sickness for obvious reasons (see Leviticus 20:18).

Paul also said the body was for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Our bodies were created by the Lord and for the Lord. No man ever created his own body. Fathers and mothers do not make the bodies of their children; they merely begin the process. God gave each of us a body to use in our service to him because we belong to him. Our main service is to prepare us (our spirits) to become his sons for eternity. Everything else is secondary.

Therefore, the body is for the Lord, to use as we strive, and help others strive, to become his eternal sons. And the Lord is for the body, not only because he created and sustains it, but because as his sons our body is the temple of his Spirit. Paul speaks of that a little farther in this book.

Our bodies perish, but when we are faithful to God, becoming qualified to be his sons for eternity, then he will raise up our spirit by his power, just as he raised up our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, live not for your body, but use it to serve him and prepare yourself for eternal sonship in heaven.

## We are body-parts of Christ

- **Know ye not that your bodies are body-parts of Christ? Therefore, having taken the body-parts of the Christ, should I make them body-parts of a harlot? May it not happen! Or know ye not that he who is joined to a harlot is one body? For, The two, he says, will be in one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit** (First Corinthians 6:15-17).

God gave us a body to house our spirit. And as disciples of Christ, our body also houses the Spirit of God and of Christ. Remember what Paul said to the brothers at Rome: **“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.**

**“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 8:6-11).

Although the Spirit of our Lord Christ has an incorruptible body in heaven with God, his spirit also lives on the earth in us, in our bodies. Collectively we comprise a kind of mega-body for him in the world. Therefore, each one of us is a part of his body here upon the earth. Our bodies are body-parts of his spirit that is in us. (I explain much more about the nature of spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.)

Since the Spirit of Christ is in us, Paul said, then we are united in spirit with him. And Paul gave the example of the unity of a husband and wife, quoting from the book of Genesis: **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24). And that oneness of the flesh includes sexual intimacy, which is physically joining bodies together.

Paul said that if a disciple joined himself with a harlot, it would make the body-parts of Christ become the body-parts of a harlot. But how could that be? How could the body-parts of Christ ever be sinful? That can only be explained by understanding how we are the body-parts of Christ upon the earth.

When the Spirit of Christ came to this earth he put on a body of flesh. And while he was in the flesh he needed to eat; he needed to rest and sleep; he needed to expel body waste; he suffered from fatigue and pain. He had all the weaknesses of human nature, although he never sinned.

His Spirit is now in heaven with an incorruptible body (see Revelation 1:13-16). However, he has extended his Spirit down to join with his disciples here upon the earth by entering into our bodies. That means his Spirit is sharing our bodies with us. Our bodies become his body-parts on the earth joined together to create a special mega-body for him, which is his church. And therefore, his Spirit works with our spirit to continue promoting and spreading his good news of salvation. It works within us through our knowledge of his will, and through the influence of our conscience.

Nevertheless, even though his Spirit is in us, our spirit still has control of our body. Hence, his disciples can still sin, which means some of his body-parts can sin. Consider our own body parts. Certain parts of them can rebel and become cancerous. That sometimes happens to the body of Christ upon the earth now. When some of his disciples, as his body-parts, sin, that is like cancer in his body, the church.

Now, having cancerous parts does not make the entire body guilty, but it does threaten the body. Harlotry is like a cancer. Hence, when some part of the body of Christ joins to a harlot that does not make Christ or his body guilty, but it is an evil that threatens his body, the church. And the cure is for the body-part to either stop sinning, or for the body to cast out that part.

Notice how Paul said that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Like the Lord’s Spirit, our spirit is a dynamic and intelligent force. And when we join with him to become one of

his disciples, then our spirit joins with his Spirit so that we can work together to bear fruit for truth and righteousness. It unites our spirit with his Spirit for a kind of oneness.

Remember what he said about that oneness 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).

## Flee fornication

- **Flee fornication. Every sin, whatever a man may do, is outside the body, but he who fornicates sins against his own body** (First Corinthians 6:18).

Fornication is a great temptation to every normal person, especially during the time of our youth. It is such a great temptation that many people have become guilty of it. Paul wrote that dire warning about it because it seems so harmless. The world rarely sees anything harmful about it, and so it is commonly tolerated. It is even encouraged during these spiritually decadent times. Many claim we are harmed if we do not fornicate. They teach that it is healthier to indulge than to restrain. Therefore, I think I can say that most people now are guilty of it.

Paul taught the opposite, warning how it harms the body. I can think of at least two ways that fornication sins against a man's body. First, it sins against the oneness of flesh that is marriage. That happens even before marriage.

For example, many years ago I read the comments of a man who had fornicated with many women before he married. He said those experiences made bonding with his wife much more difficult. For whenever he bed with her, the memories of those other women kept coming into his mind, and distracted from his feelings for his wife. It was almost like he was being intimate again with those other women in his mind, even though he was using the body of his wife. Scoffers deny the harmfulness of such things, but they are a deadly threat against the beautiful oneness of flesh that is marriage.

There is another way I believe fornication sins against a man's body, although I have not found any verifying evidence. I have not found it because the world tries to conceal such things. Hence, I can only conjecture. I will conjecture to help reinforce Paul's warning against fornication.

Sexual behavior is stressful, especially during the times of climax. That is especially true when bedding with a different person. For I have heard it said about fornication (which the world euphemistically calls an affair), that it was like eating soup: too hot at the beginning and too cold at the ending. Hence, the stress of frequent times of that “hot” period of fornication can result in a shortened lifespan. And that may be another way a man sins against his own body when he fornicates.

Nevertheless, regardless of how it happens, Paul said that a man sins against his own body when he fornicates, and he was proclaiming the word of God. And since God was our Creator, he knows everything about us. Remember that when you are tempted to fornicate.

## Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

- **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).

Not only is the Spirit of Christ in us, but God's Holy Spirit is also in us. Remember, when we put on Christ we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Which, as the Lord said, the world cannot receive: **“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 [the Holy Spirit], 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 Paul said earlier in this book, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy this man, for the temple of God is holy, which ye are”** (First Corinthians 3:16-17).

Collectively our bodies comprise the temple of God on the earth because his Holy Spirit is in us. That means it is a living temple, not one of wood and stone. Therefore, we must always be careful to keep our bodies spiritually pure and holy.

## We were bought with a price

- **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).

Since God created everything, he owns everything. And because sin against him always leads to destruction and death, then whoever sins is punished by death. Like Adam, every man who sins is condemned to die, regardless of who he is, because God is impartial. That means we have all been condemned to death because we have all sinned.

However, Christ was able to redeem us from that condemnation. He bought us from God and redeemed us with his own precious blood. As Peter said, **“Knowing that ye were redeemed from your vain behavior inherited from fathers, not with perishable silver or gold, but by precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and unspotted—of Christ ...”** (First Peter 1:17-19).

Our redemption was part of God's payment to Christ for living as a man on the earth in perfect obedience to him, proving that sin is not inevitable, thus condemning his enemies. Therefore, only those souls who are bought and redeemed by Christ can receive salvation. And he will only redeem those who willfully repent of their sins and obey him and his righteousness. I explain all of those things in much more detail in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Paul said we should therefore glorify God in our body and our spirit, which is of God. Our existence consists of both our body of flesh and our eternal spirit. Hence, we should glo-

rify God in everything about us, because our very existence is from God. And now we belong to his only begotten Son, our Savior Jesus Christ who has given us the promise of eternal glory with him in heaven.

## Marriage

- **Now concerning the things of which ye wrote to me. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband** (First Corinthians 7:1-2).

The record of any letters that the Corinthians sent to Paul have been lost. Paul's writings clearly indicate that he believed it was better to remain unmarried. However, he also made it clear that was his personal opinion, the reasons for which he gives farther in this book. He never condemned marriage. Indeed, the above passage encourages it.

Moreover, Paul condemned men who forbade marriage, because he 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, forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods, which God created for partaking with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth”** (First Timothy 4:1-3).

God instituted marriage at the beginning with Adam and Eve. For he said, **“It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a help meet for him”** (Genesis 2:18). Furthermore, the Bible says, **“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 ...”** (Genesis 1:27-28).

Thus mankind is commanded to marry (1) for companionship, and (2) in order to produce children. Also, the book of Hebrews says, **“Marriage is precious in every way, and the undefiled bed, but God will judge fornicators and adulterers”** (Hebrews 13:4). Fornication is evil, but in the sight of God marriage is precious in every way, even though Paul said that remaining celibate was good.

God said that men and women need companionship, and mankind needs to reproduce and multiply; consequently, marriage is necessary. It is necessary because fornication is forbidden. God does not want us to live like the beasts, wandering about from mate to mate. Therefore, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. Notice however, Paul did not say that each man should have his own wives.

## The right of husbands and wives

- **Let the husband render the goodwill owed to the wife, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife has not the right of her private body, but the husband, and likewise also the husband has not the right of his private body, but the wife.**
- **Do not deprive each other except from agreement for a time, so that ye may have time for fasting and prayer. And come together again for the same**

**thing, so that Satan not tempt you because of your lack of self-control** (First Corinthians 7:3-5).

There is great variation among people in the strength of their sexual appetite. Indeed, there are some who never have any. That may be one reason why Paul had no desire to marry. For having a strong sexual appetite means a man will need to struggle against many temptations to fornicate unless he is married. And even when a man is married, if his wife often withholds herself from him, such a man will have many struggles against the temptation to fornicate.

Hence, Paul commanded husbands and wives to render the goodwill owned to each other. That means they should not withhold themselves from sexual intimacy. Paul even reinforced that command by saying that the private part of the wife does not belong to her; it belongs to her husband. And the private part of the husband does not belong to him; it belongs to his wife. Therefore, when either a wife or a husband resists sexual intimacy, they are acting like thieves, keeping what belongs to someone else.

Nevertheless, love should always be the highest consideration. There will always be times when sexual intimacy is best delayed because of various inopportune or inappropriate circumstances. No husband or wife should make selfish demands when it would cause some kind of hurt to the other, or to anyone else. Marriage is always best when each one is loving and unselfish toward the other.

Paul commanded against depriving each other of the marriage rights. However, he did say that deprivation was permitted during times of fasting and prayer, but only with mutual agreement. And even then they were to come back together for the same thing (sexual intimacy). That was to prevent Satan from tempting them because of lack of self-control. Being tempted that way means indulging in sin. For there is no sin in being subjected to temptation. Being tempted can mean either succumbing to sin, or simply being subjected to temptation.

## Paul's wish

- **Now I say this from concession not from commandment. For I wish all men to be even as myself** (First Corinthians 7:6-7).

When Paul said, **“I say this from concession,”** he was referring to his words **“... let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”** He was not commanding everyone to marry. He was merely conceding the right of any man or woman to marry. It was his wish that all men be as himself, which was unmarried.

Why would Paul wish all men to be unmarried? For if all men had been like Paul, then mankind would long ago have ceased to exist in the world. If he was referring to all of the disciples of Christ, that would mean every child in the world would be born and reared by unbelievers. Neither explanation makes any sense.

I believe what he meant is explained in what he said a little farther on: **“Now concerning the virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give an opinion, as having obtained mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy. I suppose therefore this to be good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to be this way: Are thou**

**bound to a wife? Do not seek separation. Are thou free from a wife? Do not seek a wife”** (First Corinthians 7:25-27).

Paul said it was his opinion about marriage, not a commandment. And his opinion was based upon **“the present distress.”** Therefore, when Paul said he wished all men to be even as himself, the reason was no doubt **“because of the present distress,”** not for all men for all time.

Indeed, Paul said in his letter to Timothy, **“I desire therefore the younger women to marry, to bear children, to manage house, to give not one occasion to him who opposes on account of slander. For some have already turned aside after Satan”** (First Timothy 5:14-15). And how could women marry and bear children without men?

### Each man has his own gift

- **However each man has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another after that** (First Corinthians 7:7).

Notice how Paul said that the ability to remain unmarried was a gift from God. When Jesus gave his commandment about divorce, his disciples said to him, **“If the case of the man with his wife is this way, it is not advantageous to marry.”** Jesus replied 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 all men are able to receive that saying. Not all men can remain unmarried without being tempted. Some men have such a weak sexual appetite that they are not tempted at all. Some men have such strong self-control that they are unaffected by temptation. Those things may be the kind of gifts from God that Paul spoke about. They may not be something we can give ourselves. Remember, Jesus said that his saying about eunuchs was **“to whom it has been given.”** Nevertheless, every man must decide for himself if he has the gift and the desire to remain unmarried.

### Paul says it is good to remain unmarried

- **But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I** (First Corinthians 7:8).

Paul said again that it was good for the unmarried to remain unmarried. He also said it was good for widows to remain unmarried. Again, he did not mean all widows for all time, because remember, in his first letter to Timothy, when he was speaking about aid for widows, he said, **“But refuse younger widows ... I desire therefore the younger women to marry, to bear children, to manage house, to give not one occasion to him who opposes on account of slander. For some have already turned aside after Satan”** (First Timothy 5:11-15).

## Better to married than to burn

- **But if they have no self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn** (First Corinthians 7:9).

Self-control depends upon several things. It depends upon the strength of the appetite and the desire; it depends upon the temptations faced; and it depends upon the strength of the will. Those are things that vary among us, and each man and woman must make his own decision.

What Paul meant by burning includes both consequences of not marrying. First, a strong urge can be like a burning fire. Consider what Jeremiah said about the urge he had to prophesy to the people: **“O Jehovah, thou have persuaded me, and I was persuaded. Thou are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all the day; everyone mocks me. For as often as I speak, I cry out. I cry, Violence and destruction! Because the word of Jehovah is made a reproach to me, and a derision, all the day.**

**“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 20:7-9).

In the same way a strong sexual appetite can be like a burning fire shut up in the bones, and it will make a man weary with forbearing. Thus, Paul said it was better to marry than to burn. However, I need to say something about stimulating ourselves to relieve that burning. The Bible is completely silent about that activity. In my judgment God allows it to be done. Therefore, let not him who does not experience that burning condemn him who does. God has allowed us freedom to use our own judgment about how to satisfy the various appetites of our flesh, except in any kind of perverse or forbidden way.

There is another way being unmarried can lead to burning. If a man indulges his appetite wrongfully, committing fornication to satisfy it, then he will burn in hell. Thus, Paul said it was better to marry than to burn, meaning to either burn with an unsatisfied appetite or to indulge the lust sinfully and burn in hell.

## Commands about separation

- **And to those who are married, I do not command but the Lord. The wife is not to separate from her husband. But even if she separates, she shall remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to leave his wife** (First Corinthians 7:10-11).

Paul now describes commands of the Lord about marriage separations among believers. First I must explain that there are two kinds of marital separation: separation that is temporary, and separation that is permanent, which is called divorce. The Old Testament says a few things about divorce. Three of the four biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) speak of divorce. No other part of the New Testament uses that word, including the writings of Paul. Therefore, when Paul speaks of separation we must use the context to determine what kind he means.

Paul said that the Lord commands women to remain with their husbands. However, if for some reason she does separate from him, she must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to him. And the same commands are for the husband.

That command is about any kind of separation. For God intended marriage to be for life. As Jesus said about the marriage bond, **“So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, no man shall separate”** (Matthew 19:6).

However, those things assume fornication was not involved. For Jesus also said, **“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).

There are many possible circumstances that would cause a husband and wife to separate. Nevertheless, any separation should be treated like a broken body, because their oneness is failing. And as part of the body of Christ we should all do what we can to help reconciliation and healing.

Love and gentleness should always be a part of whatever is done, because the suffering of separation is almost like the suffering of dying. That is especially true when there are children. Even secular research has proven how stressful divorce is to the whole family.

### Paul’s opinion about separation

- **But to the rest I say, not the Lord. If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and this woman consents to dwell with him, he should not leave her. And whichever woman has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to dwell with her, she should not leave him.**
- **For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified by the husband, then otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy** (First Corinthians 7:12-14).

Paul now gives his opinions (**“not the Lord”**) about marriage separation when a husband or wife is an unbeliever. Now, we disciples of Christ are not to marry unbelievers to begin with, because Paul said in his second letter to the Corinthians, **“Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness? And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what share have believers with non-believers?”** (Second Corinthians 6:14-15).

However, such **“unequally yoked”** marriages are impossible to avoid if unbelievers marry but one of them is later converted to Christ. That is the kind of situation Paul is giving his personal advice about. He recommends remaining together if the unbelieving wife or husband is agreeable.

Paul said the unbelieving spouse is sanctified by the one who believes. That sanctification does not provide for the unbeliever’s soul salvation. But it does mean the unbeliever is helped to live righteously by their believing spouse.

Paul also spoke of the harmful effect of separation on the children. He said that by remaining together the children were holy, but with separation they were unclean. Again Paul is not speaking of the eternal souls of the children. He is speaking of the evil and unclean effects it has on their earthly lives.

And the evidence for that is well documented. Children without a father or mother living with them are much more inclined to be rebellious. And they are generally retarded in their mental maturity. With rare exceptions, they are not happy and mentally healthy children.

### If the unbeliever separates

- **But if the unbeliever separates, he shall separate. The brother or the sister has not been bound in such things. And God has called us to peace** (First Corinthians 7:15).

Paul is here speaking about divorce. Otherwise, why would he speak about a brother or a sister not being bound in separation? How can you be separated and yet still be bound? He was speaking about physical separation and the bond of marriage. Paul said that kind of marriage situation was not required; a believer was not bound in such a marriage. Hence, divorce was allowed. Of course, it was not required either. We are free to make our own decisions in such situations.

Paul added that God has called us to peace. Marital conflicts can be a terrible form of strife. There is rarely any peace when the hearts of husbands and wives are divided. Therefore, it is better to be separated. The uncleanness of marital strife is worse than the uncleanness of marital separation. And since God has called us to peace, then separation is the best choice in those cases.

### Saving the other

- **For how do thou know, O wife, whether thou will save thy husband? Or how will thou know, O husband, whether thou will save thy wife?** (First Corinthians 7:16).

Paul is here giving another reason to remain with an unbelieving spouse. It gives the believer an opportunity to save the soul of the unbeliever. For husbands and wives have great influence on each other, even when words are not used. Consider what Peter said about wives: **“Likewise the wives, being subordinate to their own husbands, so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they will be gained without a word by the behavior of the wives, observing, in fear, your pure behavior”** (First Peter 3:1-2).

Nevertheless, when we are married to an unbeliever we are free to decide for ourselves whether to separate, especially when the unequal yoke becomes very harmful. For **“God has called us to peace.”**

## As a man was called so let him walk

- **Only, as God has distributed to each man, as the Lord has called each, so let him walk. And so I command in all the congregations.**
- **Was any man called circumcised? He should not become uncircumcised. Was any man called in uncircumcision? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, instead, the keeping of God's commandments. Each man, in the situation in which he was called, in this he should remain** (First Corinthians 7:17-20).

Paul now speaks of the changes in our lives when we first become converted to Christ, because we become a new person in our manner of life. For Paul said in his second letter to them, **“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).

Nevertheless, Paul commands each man to remain in the situation in which he was called. We should not make radical changes in our circumstances of life. Even now there are stories of people who are completely uprooting themselves with some kind of vain hope that they would be given new and better lives.

Often they are following evil men, who, using **“their smooth words and elegant speech they deceive the hearts of the naïve”** (Romans 16:18). During Paul's time many such men were Jews who were attempting to persuade the Gentiles Christians to obey the laws of Moses. Hence, Paul spoke about the uselessness of circumcision in service to God. All that matters is the keeping of God's commandments, which are all now through Jesus Christ, not Moses.

## Concerning bondmen

- **Were thou called being a bondman? It should not concern thee. However if also thou are able to become free, take advantage of it instead. For he who was called in the Lord a bondman is a freedman of the Lord.**
- **Likewise also he who was called a free man is a bondman of Christ. Ye were bought with a price, become not bondmen of men. Brothers, each man, in what he was called, should remain in this before God** (First Corinthians 7:21-24).

Some form of bondage has existed throughout history, but it varies considerably in degree. Voluntary commitments, as in military or domestic service, is a form of bondage. During wartime captive peoples are commonly used as forced labor. The slavery of Negroes in America was one of the more extreme kinds of bondage. The Negroes were treated more like livestock than as humans. To our nation's shame, many Americans even considered them to be a kind of sub-human race. The theory of evolution promoted that belief.

Paul made no distinction between the kind of bondage when he said we should not be concerned about it. He was referring to concern about our eternal souls. As long as we are not commanded to disobey God, being in bond service should not worry us.

Paul even said **“he who was called in the Lord a bondman is a freedman of the Lord.”** That means even in human bondage we are still serving the Lord. For Paul said to the Ephesians, **“Bondmen, be obedient to the masters according to flesh, with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your heart as to the Christ. Not according to eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, bond-serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to men”** (Ephesians 6:5-7). That means as long as we are doing things that are righteous in the sight of God, whether in bond service to men or not, we are serving the Lord.

Nevertheless, Paul did say that bondmen should take advantage of opportunities to become free. As a bondman of the Lord it is better not to be a bondman of men. Sometimes the will of the master will be against the will of God, which will create a conflict in a Christian bondman. He cannot serve both God and men when an earthly master commands unrighteousness.

As Jesus said when he was contrasting the pursuit of worldly treasures with heavenly treasures, **“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). When conflicts arise about doing something unrighteous, that may provide an opportunity to become free. The master may be willing to free such a bondman just to get rid of him.

When Paul said we should not become bondmen of men, he was referring to bond service to unrighteous men. We cannot serve both righteousness and unrighteousness. As Jesus said, we cannot serve two masters. Therefore, we should never become bondmen of unrighteous men because we are bondmen of Christ.

However, when we become bondmen of righteous men we are still serving the Lord. Remember, Paul said to the Ephesians that bond service to righteous men was as serving to the Lord: **“... as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, bond-serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to men.”**

Paul then said a third time that in what each man was called (to Christ) he should remain in that before God. However, he was referring to the immediate situation of a new disciple. For we are certainly not commanded against ever making any changes in the circumstances of our lives.

### Paul's opinion about virgins

- **Now concerning the virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give an opinion, as having obtained mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy. I suppose therefore this to be good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to be this way:**
- **Are thou bound to a wife? Do not seek separation. Are thou free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But also if thou did marry thou have not sinned, and if the virgin married she has not sinned. Yet such kind will have stress in the flesh, but I spare you** (First Corinthians 7:25-28).

Again Paul gives his opinion about marriage. Notice that when he gives his opinion he qualified his words by saying (1) “... **having obtained mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy,**” and (2) “**I suppose therefore this to be good because of the present distress ... .**”

Paul gave his opinion to them about marriage because he could be trusted to give good advice. He also said his opinion was because of “**the present distress.**” What that present distress was is never told. It could have been a great famine as mentioned in this passage: “**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 to be a great famine in the whole world, which also happened under Claudius Caesar**” (Acts 11:27-28).

Or it could have been a great persecution, such as the one that happened against the church at Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen: “**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**” (Acts 8:1).

What that present distress was is not important to the lessons that Paul is giving here. As Jesus said, in this world there are always going to be times of distress. Nevertheless, whatever it was, Paul said it was a *present* distress. In other words, it was only for the time being. Hence, the advice he gave should not be considered good advice for every time and situation.

Paul’s advice was to neither marry nor separate from marriage. He said nobody would sin if they married, but they would “**have stress in the flesh.**” And Paul’s advice was given to spare them. Apparently the present distress was particularly threatening to those who were married. And that was probably because of the added care needed for children.

Notice how Paul contrasted the reader with virgins, saying, “... **if thou didst marry thou have not sinned, and if the virgin married she has not sinned.**” However, he certainly did not mean that the reader “**thou**” was not virgin. In the Bible the word virgin commonly refers to women who have never bed with a man. Therefore, Paul was speaking directly to men, and indirectly to women. His words “**if thou**” refer to men.

That is the way the entire Bible was written, directly to men, with rare exceptions. With God there is indeed a double standard between men and women, because he made them to be different. As Paul said later in this book when he was speaking of head coverings, “**For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, being an image and glory of God, but woman is a glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. For also man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man**” (First Corinthians 11:7-9).

### The time is shortened

- **But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened. It is the remaining, so that also those who have wives may be as not having, and those who weep, as not weeping, and those who rejoice, as not rejoicing, and those who buy, as not possessing, and those who use this world, as not making full use, for the form of this world passes away** (First Corinthians 7:29-31).

Paul was probably again referring to “**the present distress**” when he said the time was shortened and it is the remaining. Nevertheless, for each one of us the time we have remaining to live is shortened, becoming less each day. Regardless of how old we are, or how much longer we may live, we are still living in the remaining part of our lives. How much is remaining is rarely known to us.

Indeed, our entire lives in the world are very brief. 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). The world itself is a transient thing. For Paul said its form passes away. Therefore, in a general sense, what Paul said can be applied to every disciple of Christ. We should live as preparing for eternal life in heaven.

Regarding his words about having wives, about weeping, about rejoicing, about buying, and about using this world, those things refer to our earthly pleasures, sorrows, joys, and trading activities. As Christians, having wives, weeping, rejoicing, trading, and using this world, are only transient things that are incidental to our future lives in heaven. Therefore, we should act as if those things are secondary to us. Let us not live as if the things of this life are all there is for us.

Now that does not mean we should not take them seriously, because we are going to be judge by how we live in the world. Nevertheless, how we treat those things should contrast with how the world treats them. For the world that is all there is to their lives. But for us they are merely preparatory for our future lives. For how we use those things in our service to God will determine how we are judged. Remember the parable Jesus told about the men who were given talents to work with (see Matthew 25:14-30).

## Paul wants them without worry

- **But I want you to be without worry** (First Corinthians 7:32).

Paul said earlier about those who marry, “**But such kind will have stress in the flesh, but I spare you.**” Paul loved his fellow disciples, and he did not want them to have any more stresses and worries. That was his motive for the advice he was giving. He did not want to deprive them of the good things in marriage, but in his opinion it was better not to become married “**because of the present distress.**” However, he did advise the married not to seek separation either.

## Cares of men and women

- **The unmarried man cares for things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord. But he who is married cares for things of the world, how he will please his wife. And the wife and the virgin are differentiated. The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, so that she may be set apart both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares for the things of the world, how she will please her husband** (First Corinthians 7:32-34).

Paul gives more reasons why he thinks it is better to be unmarried. Remember, when Paul began his advice about remaining unmarried, he said, “**Now concerning the virgins I**

**have no commandment of the Lord, but I give an opinion ... .”** Therefore, we should not take his opinions as commandments. Do not contradict Paul himself.

Much error and evil has resulted from men taking Paul’s opinions and concluding that marriage is only for the spiritually weak. The Roman Catholics have promoted that evil idea for centuries, which portrays their priesthood as superior to the so-called laity. However, the author of Hebrews said, **“Marriage is precious in every way, and the undefiled bed, but God will judge fornicators and adulterers”** (Hebrews 13:4).

Paul contrasted the difference between the unmarried man and the married man in things that are cared for: caring for the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, versus caring for the things of the world, how to please his wife. Paul was not saying that a married man cares not for things of the Lord, how he will please the Lord. He was making a contrast between opportunities.

The unmarried Christian man has more opportunities to care for the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, while the married Christian man has more worldly commitments, how to please his wife. And he made the same contrast between married and unmarried Christian women.

By necessity husbands and wives are going to care for the things of the world, including how to please each other. That means they will have more worldly cares. For example, children are a natural consequence of marriage, and caring for them is an added burden. Having more worldly cares that way is not wrong. Remember, the Bible says that marriage is precious in every way. Moreover, having cares for things of the world is not wrong in itself. Such cares are wrong when they cause us to do wrong.

Paul was not making an either/or contrast when he spoke about caring for things of the Lord versus caring for things of the world. His contrast about caring was no more literal and absolute than were the words of Jesus about losing our life: **“... he who loses his life because of me will find it”** (Matthew 10:39). Paul’s contrast was about the difference in opportunities.

Now regarding Paul’s words about the unmarried woman being set apart both in body and in spirit. The Greek word for “set apart” is the same one that is commonly translated “holy,” and most translations say it that way. However, I translated that word to “set apart,” because that is much more descriptive.

The unmarried woman is set apart both in body and in spirit from the responsibilities of married life, enabling her to have more opportunities for things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. She is not a more holy woman in the sense of being more pure and righteous before God. Otherwise, why would Paul say that womankind is saved through childbearing: **“But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety”** (First Timothy 2:15)? Of course, that does not mean every woman must be a mother either.

Moreover, when Paul was speaking to Timothy about widows, he said, **“Let no widow be enrolled under sixty years old, having become the wife of one man, being testified in good works: if she has reared children, if she has been hospitable to strangers, if she has washed the feet of the sanctified, if she has relieved those who are afflicted, if she has followed every good work”** (First Timothy 5:9-10).

Paul's reference here to the unmarried woman caring for the things of the Lord probably refers to women like Phoebe, about whom he said to the Romans, **"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). Phoebe was probably unmarried, and was thus able to devote more of her time to the work of the Lord than if she had a husband and children.

### Paul speaks for their benefit

- **And I say this for your own benefit, not that I may cast restraint upon you, but for what is respectable and assiduous toward the Lord, undistracted** (First Corinthians 7:35).

Paul makes clear his advice is not binding upon them. They were free to decide for themselves. He was telling them those things for their own benefit. Remaining unmarried would be both respectable and assiduous toward the Lord, being undistracted by the duties and responsibilities of marriage.

Paul may have said that remaining unmarried would be respectable and assiduous, because normally men and women are expected to marry. Their parents and society in general (a spiritually healthy one) encourage marriage. Alas, in this adulterous generation of Americans marriage no longer matters. Cohabitation is now as common as marriage and equally accepted. With Paul's advice Christian men and women could show how remaining honorably unmarried was respectable and assiduous in the sight of God.

### When to marry

- **But if any man thinks to behave improperly toward his virgin, if it is past the best time, and so ought to happen, she should do what she wants, she does not sin, they should marry** (First Corinthians 7:36).

Paul is here no doubt speaking about a father and his virgin daughter. Until recent times only a father had the authority to allow his young daughter to marry. Paul says that a father should not prevent his daughter from marriage when her age has passed the best time for it. Paul says she should marry if that is her desire. She does not sin by marrying. Indeed, she and the man for her should marry. It would be her father who sinned if he continued to deny her.

### Remaining celibate

- **But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has power based upon his own will, and has decided this in his heart, to keep his own celibacy, does well** (First Corinthians 7:37).

Paul is now speaking about the unmarried man (or woman) who (1) has no strong sexual need, (2) has sufficient will power (to prevent fornication), and (3) has decided for himself

to remain celibate. He says under those conditions he who remains unmarried **“does well.”** Otherwise it is better to marry.

That passage is one of the most controversial and misunderstood in the Bible. It is controversial and misunderstood because of how the word PARQENON has been translated. It is a noun that means being virgin or celibate in maturity. Most other versions translate the word to virgin because the word is in the feminine gender. However, there are many Greek words in the feminine gender that can apply to either male or female. An example is the word for church. Another example is the Greek word for security, watch, or guard. Although the word is in the feminine gender, it almost always refers to men.

Hence, most interpret the passage to say it refers either to a father and his daughter, or to a man betrothed to a woman. Such interpretations are clearly out of harmony with the previous passage that says if there is desire, then **“they should marry.”** It is obvious to me that the above passage refers to decisions made by themselves, not by a father or by anyone else.

### Doing well and doing better

- **And therefore he who gives in marriage does well, but he who does not give in marriage does better** (First Corinthians 7:38).

In that passage Paul is still referring to decisions by the unmarried themselves. Hence, the passage means he who gives himself in marriage does well, but he who does not give himself in marriage does better.

Therefore, whether a man or woman marries or does not marry, they are doing right. The only difference, in the opinion of Paul, is that those who do not marry do better. Paul may still have been speaking of the time of **“the present distress.”** However, when Jesus spoke of making yourself a eunuch because of the kingdom of the heavens, that was his response to the comment of his disciples about how it was not advantageous to marry when divorce was restricted. The implication being that it was more advantageous to remain unmarried.

Hence, whether it is better to remain unmarried or not depends upon many circumstances. Actually, there are circumstances when married people can sometimes care more for things of the Lord than when they are unmarried. A husband and wife team may sometimes be more effective, and bring more opportunities to promote the good news of Christ. That may have been the case with Aquila and Priscilla (also called Prisca), about whom Paul said to the Romans, **“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).

### Concerning widows

- **A wife is bound by law as long a time as her husband lives, but also if the husband should sleep, she is free to be married to whom she desires, only in the Lord. But she is more blessed if she remains this way according to my**

**opinion. And I also seem to have the Spirit of God** (First Corinthians 7:39-40).

When Paul said a wife was bound by law, he meant the law of Christ. The only time a Christian woman is free to marry another man is if her husband “should sleep,” which means if the body of his flesh perishes. For since Jesus said, **“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”** (John 11:15-26). When the body of our flesh dies, our spirit endures. It will either sleep until the judgment day or be taken immediately to heaven.

As with virgins, Paul advised widows to remain unmarried. He said they would be more blessed. Remember however, what Paul said to Timothy about widows marrying: **“I desire therefore the younger women to marry, to bear children, to manage house, to give not one occasion to him who opposes on account of slander. For some have already turned aside after Satan”** (First Timothy 5:14-15). Paul’s advice to the Corinthians about a widow remaining a widow must, therefore, refer to what he earlier said to them was his opinion about **“the present distress”** (First Corinthians 7:26).

Although Paul said his advice about not marrying was according to his opinion, he indicated the value of his advice by saying, **“I also seem to have the Spirit of God.”** He was too humble a man to say that his advice was from the Spirit of God. His advice was worthy because he had the Spirit of God within him, but it was still his opinion, which means it was not a command of Christ

Even a great man of God like Paul could not know of all the circumstances about everyone and everything. Remember, the book of Acts tells how Paul was wrong about his ability to convert his fellow Jews at Jerusalem (see Acts 21-22), even though he still had the Spirit of God within him. God never made Paul omniscient.

## Things sacrificed to idols

- **Now about the things sacrificed to idols. We know that all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If any man presumes to know anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man loves God, this man is known by him** (First Corinthians 8:1-3).

In that passage Paul said he was going to speak about things sacrificed to idols. However, he then began to speak about knowledge. He apparently prefaced his instructions about things sacrificed to idols that way in order to prevent those disciples from being puffed up about knowing how deluded people were about idols. He wanted them to be humble and gentle toward those who thought things offered to idols were made special in some kind of way, and not be puffed up about knowing that was a foolish superstition.

Regarding Paul’s statement about how knowledge puffs up but love builds up, those words express a profound truth. Knowledge without love (genuine love in the sight of God) makes a man arrogant and dangerous. For Solomon said, **“A wise man is strong, yea, a man of knowledge increases might”** (Proverbs 24:5). And the world is filled with examples of how knowledge puffs men up and causes them to do many evil things.

In contrast, love virtually always builds up; it is constructive and life-giving. Nevertheless, love is much more successful when guided by wisdom and knowledge. Solomon wrote much about the value of wisdom and knowledge, of which I elaborate in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

Paul then told another profound truth when he said, **“If any man presumes to know anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”** Mankind’s knowledge of the world has increased enormously since the time of Paul. Yet even now the wisest of men admit how tentative their knowledge is. The world is constantly changing, and our knowledge is changing with it. Also, the more that scientists discover about things of the world, the more complex they find them. Indeed, every new discovery exposes more mysteries.

A man who was worldly wise of a few centuries ago would almost be helpless in our age without making some dramatic changes in much of what he believed. And that will no doubt be true in the future about the wise men of our age. Hence, if a man is too confident in what he thinks he knows, that means he does not yet know how tentative our knowledge of the world is. He knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

James said that true wisdom was in meekness, not in the arrogance of knowledge alone: **“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show from his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom”** (James 3:13).

Paul spoke again about love, saying, **“... if any man loves God, this man is known by him.”** Those too are words of wisdom. A man can actually love God without knowing him. When a man loves that which is good and right and just, that means he loves God because that is what God is like. And whether a man knows God or not, he will still be known, recognized, and acknowledged by God if he loves what God loves.

And God will find a way to reveal himself to such a man through the words of Jesus Christ. For Jesus said, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”** (John 10:27). Such a man will learn of God and follow Jesus when he hears about him.

## An idol is nothing

- **Therefore about eating the things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God except one. For also since there are things called gods, whether in heaven or on the earth, as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him** (First Corinthians 8:4-6).

An idol is nothing but whatever it is made of. It is just a block of metal, wood, or stone. There is nothing more to idols. Yet people of the world still worship them. They do it from tradition and peer pressure. There is no other God except one, the living God of the Bible.

There are things that are called gods, things in the heavens and on the earth that are called gods. And there are many of them that are worshiped as gods and lords. Yet to us as disciples of Christ, there is only one God, only one true God. He is our heavenly Father, from whom all things were created, including ourselves. We are for him. We worship and serve

him only, through his Son Jesus Christ. All other gods are mythical and imaginary. The only real thing about them are the ideas about them, and the idols of metal, wood, and stone that supposedly represent them.

Likewise there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ. It was through him that all things were made. God the Father is the origin of all things. And he used his Son Jesus Christ to make them. For all things are through him. And we as his disciples are through him. For Jesus said about himself, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6).

## The weak and ignorant

- **Nevertheless the knowledge is not in all men, but some, with conscience of the idol until now, eat as sacrificed to idols, and their weak conscience is defiled. But food does not present us to God, for neither if we eat are we ahead, nor if we do not eat are we behind.**
- **But take heed lest somehow this privilege of yours becomes a stumbling-block to those who are weak. For if some man sees thee, who has knowledge, dining in an idol-temple, will not his conscience, being weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? And by thy knowledge the brother, being weak, will be ruined, for whom Christ died. And sinning this way against the brothers, and wounding their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ** (First Corinthians 8:7-12).

Remember, in ancient times sacrificing things was their main way of worshiping, whether to Jehovah the true God, or to the many false gods of the world. And one of the main things they offered were things that could be eaten. Therefore, it was a common practice for them to eat those things as part of their sacrifice ritual. Even in the law of Moses many things that were sacrificed on the altar to Jehovah were commonly eaten, although others were completely burned. Nevertheless, foods offered to God that way were considered holy, and there were other laws that regulated the eating of them.

The following command is an example of when they were allowed to eat the flesh of an offering: **“Only thy holy things which thou have, and thy vows, thou shall take, and go to the place which Jehovah shall choose. And thou shall offer thy burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, upon the altar of Jehovah thy God, and the blood of thy sacrifices shall be poured out upon the altar of Jehovah thy God, and thou shall eat the flesh. Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee, and with thy sons after thee forever, when thou do that which is good and right in the eyes of Jehovah thy God”** (Deuteronomy 12:26-28).

Since eating foods that were sacrificed to idols was also commonly practiced among Gentiles, that made the foods widely available. However, religiously speaking those foods were not like those offered on the altar to Jehovah. They were more like the kosher foods of the Jews that many people eat without subscribing to Judaism.

Hence, Gentile disciples would find themselves dining where there was food that had been offered to idols. Indeed, Paul even mentioned **“dining in an idol-temple.”** That probably

refers to a restaurant that was part of an idol temple complex. Consequently, that raised the question of whether it was right for them to do such things or not.

In his teachings Paul often emphasized our liberty in Christ, making us free from the restrictions of laws and ordinances from God, including those about foods (except for eating blood). Therefore, Paul taught the Corinthians that there was no sin—in and of itself—in eating the things sacrificed to idols. For he said, **“But food does not present us to God, for neither if we eat are we ahead, nor if we do not eat are we behind.”**

However, he also added these words: **“But take heed lest somehow this privilege of yours becomes a stumbling-block to those who are weak.”** It was not the things eaten, but the influence our eating would have on the weaker members. Remember, the command to abstain from things sacrificed to idols meant we were not to have any part in contributing to the worship of false gods. Simply eating things that were sacrificed would not contribute to their worship, any more than eating kosher foods would mean contributing to Judaism. Paul spoke more about that farther in this book (see First Corinthians 10:25-31).

There is a passage in the book of Revelation where Jesus rebuked disciples for eating idol sacrifices. He said to the congregation at Pergamos, **“But I have a few things against thee, because thou have there men who adhere to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, even to eat idol sacrifices, and to fornicate”** (Revelation 2:14).

However, eating idol sacrifices was part of their worship of false gods, because that was the case of Balaam. That sinful prophet had taught the king of Moab how to weaken the sons of Israel by separating them from Jehovah. Here is how it happened: **“And the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, for they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods. And the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal-peor, and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel”** (Numbers 25:1-3). Their eating things that were sacrificed to idols was sharing in the worship of those false gods.

## Cause no brother to stumble

- **Therefore if food causes my brother to stumble, I will no, not eat meat into the age, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble** (First Corinthians 8:13).

Notice how Paul did not say he would never eat meat sacrificed to idols. He said he would never eat meat if it caused a Christian brother to stumble. However, Paul said farther in this book, **“For why is my liberty judged by another conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I maligned about which I express thanks?”** (First Corinthians 10:29-30). The critical thing is to avoid causing a brother to stumble. If there is simply a difference of opinion, then we each have liberty to choose for ourselves. I will make more comments about that farther in this book.

## Paul's apostleship

- **Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are ye not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet at least I am to you, for ye are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord** (First Corinthians 9:1-2).

The circumstances of Paul's apostleship made it easier for unrighteous men to challenge his authority and deny him. Paul asked them four questions about his apostleship. Remember, responding to questions requires thinking. And he wanted them to think more clearly about what they really thought of him. In my comments, however, rather than simply repeating what he said, I will state his questions in words that I think they mean.

He asked the Corinthian disciples if they doubted he was an apostle. He asked if they did not know he was free. As an apostle Paul was free from the authority of any other prophet of God. He had equal authority with all the others. He asked the Corinthian disciples if they were unaware of that. He asked them if they did not believe his testimony about having seen Jesus Christ our Lord. He asked them if they did not consider themselves to be a result of his work in the Lord.

How could they possibly doubt him, doubt his testimony to them, and doubt all he had done for them? How blind could they be? What kind of cold-hearted men would they be? Paul did not think those things were possible. Other men could deny his apostleship, but Paul was confident about his brothers at Corinth. They would believe and support him. He love them and he knew they love him.

Paul said they were the seal of his apostleship in the Lord. Their very existence as faithful disciples of Christ was proof that Paul was an apostle. For no fraud could ever have done what he did with them and for them.

## His rights as an apostle

- **My defense to those who examine me is this. Have we no, not a right to eat and to drink? Have we no, not a right to lead about a sister wife, as also the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or have only I and Barnabas no right not to be occupied earning a living?** (First Corinthians 9:3-6).

There is nothing wrong with examining each other. Indeed, the apostle 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). However, those who were examining Paul were challenging the legitimacy of his apostleship.

Paul's continued asking them questions about himself. He wanted them to think more carefully about him. Those three questions he asked in that passage all refer to the rights of an apostle, and he applied them to himself and his co-workmen.

Regarding the question of eating and drinking, Paul and his co-workmen did have a right to receive food and drink for their evangelism. Remember what Jesus said when he first

sent out his apostles: **“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 10:9-10). The workman for Christ is indeed worthy of his provision.

Regarding the question of a wife, Paul and his co-workmen did have the right to be accompanied with a wife, a sister wife, meaning a Christian woman. And Paul gave the example of the other apostles, including Cephas (Peter), as well as the brothers of the Lord. From what Paul said, all of those men were married and had their wives with them.

Regarding the question of being occupied earning a living, Paul and his co-workman Barnabas did have the right not to be occupied that way. There are other needs we have besides food and drink, such as clothing and housing. Paul and his co-workmen had the right to be giving those things without having to be employed simply for the purpose of purchasing them.

Paul apparently asked those questions because (1) there were many times when he and his co-workmen provided their own food and drink, (2) he and his co-workmen were not accompanied by wives, and (3) he and Barnabas did spend time occupied earning a living.

They did not always avail themselves of their rights for the sake of their work. They did not want to be a burden to the disciples, and they did not want to be distracted from their work in order to care for a wife and children. They sacrificed those rights for the cause of the good news of Christ.

Were those who were examining Paul using his sacrifice of those rights as evidence that he was not an apostle? Were they saying Paul was not an apostle because he did not use those rights? That was probably why he asked those questions to the brothers at Corinth. Were those sacrifices evidence of his love for them, or evidence he was a fraud? That seems to be why in his defense he wanted them to think about those things. No fraud would make those sacrifices.

### The dues of the laborer

- **Who ever enlists in an army at his own wage? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat from the fruit of it? Or who feeds a flock and does not eat from the milk of the flock? Do I say these things according to man, or does not the law also say these things? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shall not muzzle an ox threshing grain.**
- **Is God concerned about oxen, or does he speak altogether for our sake? For our sake, for it was written, He who plows ought to plow with hope, and he who threshes with his hope, with hope to share** (First Corinthians 9:7-10).

Again Paul asks a series of questions so they would think. This time they were about equitable compensation for laborers. And he gives the example of soldiers, farmers, and shepherds. He said those things were not just right according to men, but also right according to God. Then he quoted what was commanded in the law of Moses: **“Thou shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out *the grain*”** (Deuteronomy 25:4).

Although that command was about doing right toward laboring oxen, its lesson was about doing right toward laboring men. For Paul said that command was altogether for our sake,

because laboring oxen are working for us. Indeed, everything is for our sake. Remember what Paul said to the Romans about things for our sake: **“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, everything is altogether for the sake of those who love God and are the called according to purpose.

When Paul quoted those words that were written about plowing and threshing with hope, hope to share, those words are actually not in the Bible. Where they were written is not known. Nevertheless, that is irrelevant, because they are now written in the New Testament through this letter to the Corinthians. Remember, the Bible does not contain all the words of wisdom in the world, which would be impossible. What it contains is sufficient for our souls. Therefore, it is necessary for us to gain wisdom and knowledge from other sources to live successfully in the world.

## Sowing and reaping the spiritual and the carnal

- **If we sowed spiritual things to you, is it a great thing if we will reap your carnal things? If others are partakers of the right from you, are not we more? Nevertheless we did not use this right, but we cover all things, so that we may not give any hindrance to the good news of the Christ** (First Corinthians 9:11-12).

Paul continues justifying his right to receive material support from them. He labored sowing spiritual things to them. Hence, he deserves to reap material things from them. If other men who labor for them deserved to partake of benefits from them, Paul and his co-workmen were even more deserving. If they paid men who made things to provide for their bodies, then Paul and his co-workmen deserved even more to be paid for providing for their souls.

That kind of recompense is good and right and just. Nevertheless, Paul said that he and his co-workmen did not use that right. Instead, they provided such things for themselves. They covered all things, including all things that they needed. And the reason was because they did not want to do anything to hinder the good news of Christ. Requiring financial aid from them would have placed an added burden upon those disciples, which may have been a hindrance to their acceptance and growth in the good news of Christ.

## Receiving support for services

- **Know ye not that those being employed at the sacred things eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar are partakers at the altar? And so the Lord commanded those who proclaim the good news to live from the good news** (First Corinthians 9:13-14).

The priests who worked at the temple eat of the offerings made there. And the ones who served at the altar had the privilege of partaking from what was offered on the altar, although there were a few exceptions. They were even allowed to share those things with their immediate families. Those provisions were commanded by Jehovah.

Paul then said the Lord also commanded **“those who proclaim the good news to live from the good news.”** It was not a new thing for men who served God to receive their support from that service. Giving support by those who receive the good news to those who proclaim the good news is just as required as had been the support given the priests by the sons of Israel.

### Paul preached without charge

- **But I have used none of these things, and I did not write these things so that it should be done to me this way. For it is good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my boasting empty. 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.**
- **For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward, but if involuntarily, I have been entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? That, while preaching the good news, I may make the good news of the Christ without charge, in order not to make full use of my right in the good news** (First Corinthians 9:15-18).

Paul said he did not receive any support from them, and he did not write those things about support so that he could receive it. He chose not to receive it so that he could boast of his personal contribution to the good news of Christ.

Paul said he was obligated to preach the good news. Indeed, he would have been under a curse if he did not preach it. For Jesus had personally commanded him to preach it. Therefore, his preaching was not a source of pride to him. He could not boast about preaching the good news of Christ, because he had no choice. Paul had been entrusted with a commission. He had been given the authority of an apostle with divine knowledge and powers, and so he was obligated to preach.

The reason Paul wanted to **“make the good news of the Christ without charge”** was so that he could be rewarded for not making full use of his right in the good news. And he wanted to be able to boast about it, to boast in the good sense of the word. He wanted to express special satisfaction about “going above and beyond the call of duty” in his service to the cause of Christ.

Paul was obligated to preach, but he was not obligated to preach without charge. Therefore, by making the good news of the Christ without charge he could have a special reward. As disciples of Christ we are all going to be rewarded with eternal life as sons of God in heaven. However, we will not all be given the same rewards there.

Remember what Jesus said about our treasures in heaven: **“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).

Paul wanted to lay up his treasures in heaven. And one way he could do it was by not making full use of his right in the good news of Christ, making it free of charge. And he

wanted to be able to express his satisfaction about it. In fact, he said it would be better for him to die, than for any man to make his boasting about it empty.

Now I must add that not all preachers should try to do what Paul did. No man after the time of the apostles has been given a personal commission to preach the good news of Christ. Therefore, unlike Paul, whose preaching was involuntary, men now become preachers voluntarily, and that in itself gives them a reward. Moreover, most of them have wives and children to support. Therefore, it would not be good for them to forsake their right to be supported.

Indeed, it would be wrong for a married man, especially one with children, to refuse support, because he would be adding an unnecessary burden to his family. Every man must use his own circumstances to judge how to lay up his treasures in heaven.

### He became all things to all men

- **For although being free from all men, I made myself a bondman to all, so that I might gain the more. 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. And I do this for sake of the good news, so that I might become a fellow participant of it (First Corinthians 9:19-23).**

Paul said that although he was not a bondman to any man, he made himself a bondman to all men. And the reason was so that he might gain more of them, more for the kingdom of God. He then gave four examples:

He became as a Jew to the Jews, so that he might gain Jews.

He became as under the law to those under law, so that he might gain those under law.

He became as without law to those without law, so that he might gain those without law.

He became as weak to the weak, so that he might gain the weak.

What he meant by the first three in that list was that he accommodated himself to each particular community when he was in each one, except of course, for anything that would have been unlawful to Christ. He never accommodated himself to sins against God.

Regarding those under law and those without law, that no doubt referred to communities that were subject to legal systems, versus those that had no legal systems. Smaller communities during those ancient times often had no written legal systems. They maintained order within their own traditional standards of ethics and justice, somewhat like the way various tribes of the American Indians did.

Regarding the weak, that may have referred to the poor and lower class individuals or societies. For example, he no doubt became as poor to those who were poor, so that he might gain the poor; he became as a nomad to those who were nomads, so that he might

gain nomads. Thus, he became all things to all men—within the bounds of God’s righteousness—so that by all means he might save some.

Now I must say that accommodating that way requires much wisdom and good judgment about how far to go. For whether they be rich and powerful or poor and weak, many people have practices that are not fitting to the kind of dignity and spiritual maturity that God wants of us. And only familiarity with the word of God can guide a man to make right decisions about making such social accommodations.

## Strive for a perishable crown

- **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).

Athletic competition has an ancient history. And it was obviously familiar to the people at Corinth because that was a city of Greece. It was the ancient Greeks who created the Olympic athletic games. Paul gave the example of a foot race in an arena. And he reminded them that all the competitors run in a race but only one (one man or one team) wins the prize. He then urged them to so run that they may seize the prize.

The prize Paul meant was the imperishable crown of eternal life with God in heaven. For Jesus said to the congregation in Smyrna, **“Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10). And Jesus will give each of us the crown of life if we become faithful to him until death. Therefore, our race is not in competition with other men; it is in competition with all the forces that are against us, because every man can win that prize.

And one of the major forces that are against us is our own body of flesh. For Paul said to the congregation at Galatia: **“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 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).

Notice, when Paul spoke about running to receive the prize, he then told how he himself struggled with his flesh, against its evil lusts that were warring against his soul. And we too must be vigorous in our competition against our fleshly lusts lest they become victorious over us.

Paul told how **“every man who strives for mastery exercises self-control in all things.”** With our modern communication media we are often shown men doing such things in the athletic realm. However, what Paul said is not only true of sporting activities, but in virtu-

ally every area of life. Exercise and training in self-control is essential for mastery of anything.

Paul was so zealous to receive the imperishable crown that he even told of giving his body a black eye to subdue it. Giving it a black eye obviously symbolized how he used physical forces of various kinds to subdue it. That also reveals how vigorously Paul had to struggle with his own flesh. He even said he fought with it. And that struggle with his flesh was deliberate and purposeful, not aimless.

Satan our great enemy does not want us to have self-control over our evil lusts and impulses that way. And since he now rules in the hearts of most Americans, there has been a great effort to outlaw corporal punishment because that is a major way to help subdue the lusts and impulses of our flesh. Hence, lawlessness in the land has greatly increased.

Notice how Paul said that even though he preached to others, he could become disqualified. How can those who preach the once-saved-always-saved doctrine ignore passages like that? Dear reader, be not misled by their false teachings. Study the Bible, and read what men like Paul said. Even though he had been saved from his past sins, he could still have been lost, disqualified from receiving the prize. His flesh could have still been victorious over him if he lost his self-control.

## The patriarchs with Moses

- **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** (First Corinthians 10:1-2).

When Jehovah brought his people the sons of Israel out from bondage in Egypt, he gave them a constant visual reminder of his presence with them. For the record says, **“And Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night departed not from before the people”** (Exodus 13:21-22).

That pillar of cloud may have been shaped like a tornado without the twisting shape cause by violent spinning of the wind. For the text says it was a pillar of cloud. However, the Bible indicates the base of that pillar of cloud did not always reach the ground. For the record says, **“And it came to pass, when Moses entered into the tent, the pillar of cloud descended, and stood at the door of the tent, and Jehovah spoke with Moses. And all the people saw the pillar of cloud stand at the door of the tent. And all the people rose up and worshiped, every man at his tent door. And Jehovah spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend, and he turned again into the camp”** (Exodus 33:10-11).

The pillar of fire was probably the same cloud that was illuminated at night. That would not only remind them of God’s presence, but it provided light for them to see without needing to create their own fires.

God also used the cloud to command the sons of Israel when to journey and when to camp. This passage explains how he did it: **“And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up**

the cloud covered the tabernacle, even the tent of the testimony, and at evening it was upon the tabernacle, as it were the appearance of fire, until morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it, and the appearance of fire by night.

“And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tent, then after that the sons of Israel journeyed. And in the place where the cloud abode, there the sons of Israel encamped. At the commandment of Jehovah the sons of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of Jehovah they encamped. As long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they remained encamped. And when the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle many days, then the sons of Israel kept the charge of Jehovah, and did not journey.

“And sometimes the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle, then according to the commandment of Jehovah they remained encamped, and according to the commandment of Jehovah they journeyed. And sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning, and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they journeyed, or *if* by day and by night, when the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

“Whether it was two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, abiding on it, the sons of Israel remained encamped, and did not journey, but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of Jehovah they encamped, and at the commandment of Jehovah they journeyed. They kept the charge of Jehovah, at the commandment of Jehovah by Moses” (Numbers 9:15-23).

Passing through the sea and being immersed in it (although not in the water itself) was when God dried up a passage through the Red Sea so the people could cross on dry land. As the record says, “**And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Jehovah caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the sons of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand, and on their left**” (Exodus 14:21-22).

That east wind probably came from the dry Sinai wilderness. It may have been like a slow moving jet stream that came from a great height over the sea, then dropped rapidly down to the surface, spreading out and moving back to the wilderness where the people were going. That rapid dropping of the air would have created a very high pressure on the surface. That very high pressure together with the wind (blowing more gently toward the wilderness where the people were going) may have been what caused the waters to be divided back for a channel.

Hurricanes, in an opposite way, have very low pressure centers. And that low pressure can cause the sea water to rise sometimes as high as twenty feet. However, the strong winds of hurricanes spin horizontally. The wind that parted the Red Sea was probably rotating vertically. And it probably had no center or “eye” as hurricanes do. It was more like a jet stream at high altitude that fanned out as it dropped down over the sea to cycle back to the wilderness. That strong east wind would not have been felt by the people because it came from a high altitude.

## The spiritual rock

- **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).

The spiritual food and drink probably refers to both the miraculous food and water they received to nourish their bodies, plus the law of Moses that was given to nourish their minds. The spiritual food was the manna that God gave them each morning. It disappeared after they entered their promised land, and has never appeared again. The spiritual drink was when God brought water from a rock in the wilderness.

The spiritual rock was the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He was Jehovah who guided them in the pillar of cloud. When the Bible mentions Jehovah or the Lord that sometimes refers to God the Father, sometimes to Christ the Son of God, and sometimes to them both. In the case of the sons of Israel in the wilderness, Paul said that Jehovah was Christ, the spiritual rock that followed them and guided them.

Remember what the apostle John said about Christ: **“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 1:10-12).

## Most of them displeased God

- **However with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn in the wilderness** (First Corinthians 10:5).

The sons of Israel in the wilderness rebelled many times against Moses and against God. Jehovah finally condemned them to wander in the wilderness forty years until they all perished there. He cursed them that way when they refused to enter into their promised land. At God’s command Moses had selected twelve leading men, one from each of their tribes, to go as spies into the promised land and bring back a report about it.

Here is most of that story: **“And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, Get you up this way by the South, and go up into the hill-country. And see the land, what it is, and the people who dwell in it, whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad, and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in strongholds, and what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there is wood in it, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first-ripe grapes. ...**

**“And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh, and brought back word to them, and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We**

came to the land where thou sent us. And surely it flows with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it.

“However the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified, very great, and moreover we saw the sons of Anak there. Amalek dwells in the land of the South. And the Hittite, and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, dwell in the hill-country. And the Canaanite dwells by the sea, and along by the side of the Jordan.

“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it. But the men who went up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up the inhabitants of it. And all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And we saw there the giants, the sons of Anak, who come of the giants. And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

“And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said to them, Would that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why does Jehovah bring us to this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey. Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

“Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes. And they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If Jehovah delights in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against Jehovah, neither fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their defense is removed from over them, and Jehovah is with us. Fear them not.

“But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of Jehovah appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. And Jehovah said to Moses, 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.

“And Moses said to Jehovah, Then the Egyptians will hear it, for thou brought up this people in thy might from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that thou Jehovah are in the midst of this people, for thou Jehovah are seen face to face, and thy cloud stands over them, and thou go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night.

“Now if thou shall kill this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because Jehovah was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.

“And now, I pray thee, let the power of the Lord be great, according as thou have spoken, saying, Jehovah is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. Pardon, I pray thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy loving kindness, and according as thou have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

“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.

“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.

“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 13:17-14:35).

There are many good lessons in that story about God being displeased with his people during that time and what he did with them. Be thou wise and learn them.

### Sin not as they sinned

- **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 (First Corinthians 10:6-10).**

Those are some other examples of how the sons of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness. Here is the passage that tells how they lusted for evil things: **“And the mixed multitude that was among them lusted exceedingly. And the sons of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic, but now our soul is dried away. There is nothing at all except this manna to look upon”** (Numbers 11:4-6).

Their complaining in that passage is nothing less than pathetic, almost laughably pathetic. They sounded like spoiled brats who were deprived of their more luxurious toys. Having no more cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic made them feel like their soul was dried away. Oh, those poor dears, having to endure such agony.

The Bible calls manna the bread from heaven (see for example Nehemiah 9:15). Yet they were so contemptuous of it that they did not even consider it edible, saying, **“There is nothing at all except this manna to look upon.”** They were truly unworthy to be called the people of God.

Now regarding the time they ate and drank, and rose up to revel. Not long after departing Egypt, and just before receiving the ten commandments, the people said they would obey Jehovah: **“And Moses went up to God. And Jehovah called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus thou shalt 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 shalt 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).

Then not long afterward Jehovah himself spoke the ten commandments to them from mount Sinai. And after God gave Moses some other commandments for the people, the record says, **“And he [Jehovah] said to Moses, Come up to Jehovah, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near to Jehovah, but they shall not come near, neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of Jehovah, and all the ordinances. And all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which Jehovah has spoken will we do.”** That was a second time they said all that Jehovah has spoken they would do.

Then the text says, **“And Moses wrote all the words of Jehovah, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar below the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the**

twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to Jehovah.

**“And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people. And they said, All that Jehovah has spoken will we do, and be obedient.”** Notice how that was the third time they said all that Jehovah has spoken they would do.

After that the text tells how God even allowed the leaders of the people to see him (in a normal human form) on mount Sinai; **“And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you concerning all these words. 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 24:1-11).

God had brought his people out of bondage in Egypt with many mighty signs and wonders. He saved them from the Egyptian army by parting the Red Sea for them. He fed them and protected them in the wilderness. He spoke many encouraging words to them through his servant Moses. With his own mighty voice he spoke the ten commandments to them from mount Sinai. And he allowed their leaders to actually see him (in the form of a common man) on the mountain.

Yet soon after that, when Moses went back up on the mountain, the 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.**

**“And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them to me. And all the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received it at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf.**

**“And they said, These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to Jehovah. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to revel”** (Exodus 32:1-6).

Moses had not been on the mountain more than forty days, yet they forsook Jehovah and made themselves a golden calf to worship, which God had strictly and often commanded them against. As the psalmist said of them, **“They made a calf in Horeb [Sinai], and worshiped a molten image. Thus they changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt,**

wondrous works in the land of Ham, *and* fearful things by the Red Sea” (Psalm 106:19-22).

Here is the record that tells how they fornicated and thousands of them fell: **“And Israel abode in Shittim. And the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, for they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods. And the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal-peor, and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel.**

**“And Jehovah said to Moses, Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them up to Jehovah before the sun, that the fierce anger of Jehovah may turn away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel, Kill ye every one his men who have joined themselves to Baal-peor.**

**“And, behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body.**

**“So the plague was stayed from the sons of Israel. And those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand”** (Numbers 25:1-9). Paul said that twenty-three thousand fell in one day. The other thousand must have been the chiefs of the people that were hanged the day before (it was unlawful to keep them hanging overnight).

The sons of Israel often challenged Jehovah. Here is the passage about when God punished them with serpents: **“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. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the standard. And it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked to the serpent of brass, he lived”** (Numbers 21:5-9).

And here is the passage that tells how they were destroyed by the destroyer, which in this case used a plague of fire: **“And the people were as murmurers, *speaking* evil in the ears of Jehovah. And when Jehovah heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of Jehovah burnt among them, and devoured in the outermost part of the camp. And the people cried to Moses. And Moses prayed to Jehovah, and the fire abated. And the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of Jehovah burnt among them”** (Numbers 11:1-3).

## They are examples for us

- **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** (First Corinthians 10:11).

Those were examples of sinners perishing by the wrath of God. He is patient and longsuffering, but when provoked sufficiently he will retaliate severely as the record shows. Knowledge of those things is a warning to all who would sin and provoke him.

What would you think of a man who was contemptuous of the warnings around an electrical power station? What would you think of him if he said he was going to climb on the wires for the fun and excitement? The Bible is filled with warnings to fear God, and he is far more powerful than all the electricity in the world. If he took the lives of sinners of that time, he will take the lives of sinners during our time.

The ends of the age refers to the times after Christ was in the world. There are many ways to categorize historical time before the ends came, the ends of the ages before Christ. For example, we can speak of the antediluvian age, the age of the patriarchs, the age of Israel during the time of the judges, and the age of Israel during the time of the kings.

The word of God records the history of all those ages. However, the Bible is now complete. There will be no record of ages added to it. The ends of the ages were when Christ came and established the kingdom of God. Christ and his kingdom is the last age recorded in the word of God, and it is the last age before the end of the world.

## Be not overconfident

- **Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall** (First Corinthians 10:12).

That passage should be kept in mind by all of us at all times. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles when they failed to remain awake: **“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”** (Matthew 26:41).

And remember what Paul said about himself: **“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). If Paul could have fallen, what man is so confident that he thinks he could never fall? Arrogant overconfidence is exceedingly dangerous in any situation. As Solomon said, **“Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18).

## God makes a way to escape every temptation

- **No temptation has taken you except is common to man. But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what ye are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, to enable you to endure** (First Corinthians 10:13).

There is no temptation that is unique. They are all common to man. And each of us has been tempted in many of the ways that all men are tempted. Of course, those different temptations vary in degree among individuals. Nevertheless, we all face temptations. Yet God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to endure.

However, in times of testing those temptations can be very great. Remember Abraham's last test of his faith, which was about sacrificing his only son from his wife Sarah as a burn offering. And remember how intensely Jesus struggled with his last great trial, when in his agony **"his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground"** (Luke 22:44).

Yet God always makes a way to escape temptation so that we can endure. I can remember many times when God gave me a way to escape temptation. It was only when I ignored those ways that I stumbled and fell. Keeping Paul's words in memory will help prevent ignoring those ways of escape, because sometimes those ways are subtle and indirect. Therefore, always be alert for them when you are tempted. Do not let any temptation blind you and cause you to fall.

## Flee idolatry

- **Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say** (First Corinthians 10:14-15).

Paul concluded all of those warnings with the command to flee idolatry. That means there is a very broad meaning to idolatry. That is probably why he spoke as to wise men, for us to judge what he said. It takes more wisdom to understand the broader meaning of idolatry.

As an example of that broader meaning, Paul included covetousness in the meaning of idolatry when he spoke of a **"covetous man, who is an idolater ..."** (Ephesians 5:5). In its narrow and ordinary sense idolatry refers to worshiping idols; covetousness is worshiping possessions; and worship refers to the adoration of and devotion to something. The modern worship of freedom and democracy is a kind of idolatry. The worship of our American constitution is idolatry, especially when it is used to overrule the will of God expressed in his Holy Bible.

Therefore, idolatry in its most general sense means worshiping anything except God. And those ancient sons of Israel were quick to worship anything besides him: things like golden calves, rich foods, and fornication. Using that broader definition Paul was warning us, whom he loved, to flee the adoration of and devotion to anything besides our Lord God.

## Participation

- **The cup of the blessing that we bless, is it not a participation of the blood of the Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation of the body of the Christ? Because we, the many, are one bread, one body, for we are all partakers of the one bread. Look at Israel according to flesh. Those who eat**

**the sacrifices, are they not partakers of the altar?** (First Corinthians 10:16-18).

Part of our wisdom to understand and judge is knowing that doing something is a participation in it. When we observe the Lord's supper with the cup and the bread, we are participating in the blood and the body of Christ. Although we are many individuals in the kingdom, our participation with the cup and the bread is a way of showing our unity with the oneness of his body. And that oneness is symbolized by the one bread. (Of course, that does not mean literally one loaf of bread, but the joint meal of bread.)

Paul then gave another example of participation. This time it was about those who eat the sacrifices that were offered upon the altar. They may not have been actively involved in doing what was required at the altar, but they were still partakers when they ate of the sacrifices. The altar was only the focal point of their worship. Making the sacrifices and eating them were both part of the worship.

Paul apparently gave that lesson about participation in order to warn against sharing in any kind of activity involving idols. Because sharing in activities involving idols means participating with them.

### Idol worship is demon worship

- **What therefore do I say, that an idol is anything, or that a sacrifice to an idol is anything? Rather, that which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to become partakers of demons** (First Corinthians 10:19-20).

Paul now returns to the more specific meaning of idolatry. He asks if an idol is anything or sacrificing to them is anything. Since idols are only blocks of metal, wood, and stone, they are nothing, and sacrificing to them is nothing. An idol is not anything in the sense of not having any life or ability to make any kind of response.

The only influence they have is purely indirect and psychological. The sight of them can corrupt the minds and spirits of those who are deceived into thinking they are something more than blocks of metal, wood, and stone. And that influence is what makes them so evil. It competes with faith in God, and makes people susceptible to many sinful practices.

Paul said that when Gentiles sacrifice to idols they are actually sacrificing to demons. Demons are very mysterious creatures. A demon is some kind of supernatural evil spirit. Hence, they are also called evil spirits. 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 the effects of demons 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).

The book of Revelation speaks of demons and idol worship, when it says, “**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**” (Revelation 9:20).

Paul also spoke of deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, when he said, “**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, forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods, which God created for partaking with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth**” (First Timothy 4:1-3).

Since demons corrupt the mind, then perhaps what Paul meant by sacrificing to demons and not to God, was the corrupting influence of idol worship. When Gentiles sacrifice to idols they do not believe they are sacrificing to blocks of metal, wood, and stone. They believe they are sacrificing to other supernatural spirits besides God. And since all such spirits are evil, that means they are sacrificing to demons (evil spirits).

I speak more about demons and evil spirits, and make many conjectures about them in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Be not a partaker of demons

- **Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons. Ye cannot be partakers of a table of the Lord, and of a table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?** (First Corinthians 10:21-22).

Idol worship is the worship of demons, and demons are enemies of God. Therefore, it is impossible to worship both demons and God. God hates such hypocrisy. For Solomon said, “**The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah, but the prayer of the upright is his delight**” (Proverbs 15:8). Participating in the honor of God’s enemies

makes it even more of an abomination when you also try to participate in the memorial of Christ.

Participation in such things as belonging to the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (which was created by a Jew) is just as evil. For the Jews are enemies of Christ, denying he is the Son of God and ignoring his commands.

When a disciple of Christ does such a thing it indeed provokes the Lord to jealousy because we belong to him. It is right, good, and just for any man to be jealous when his relationship with someone who belongs to him is threatened. And since participating in the worship of God's enemies or having fellowship with them threatens our relationship with him, it certainly does provoke him to jealousy.

And jealousy arouses God's wrath, as Moses warned the sons of Israel: **"Thou shall fear Jehovah thy God, and him thou shall serve, and shall swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples that are round about you, for Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is a jealous God, lest the anger of Jehovah thy God be kindled against thee, and he destroy thee from off the face of the earth"** (Deuteronomy 6:13-15).

And who can stand before the wrath of God? Who is so strong that he can resist God? Therefore, be wise and refuse to participate in anything that honors the enemies of God.

### All things permitted but not all 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. Let not one man seek that of himself, but each man that of the other** (First Corinthians 10:23-24).

Paul said the same kind of thing earlier in this book: **"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me ... "** He said those things when he was speaking about self-control, because he went on to say, **"... but I will not be brought under control by anything"** (First Corinthians 6:12). And what he said applies to every disciple of Christ.

Paul is now speaking about what we do that effects other things, including other people. All things are permitted for us, but not all things are expedient and constructive in their effects. Therefore, we should especially limit our liberty for the sake of others. We as brothers in spirit are one body in Christ. We should not be selfish, and seek only that of ourselves. We should each one seek that of the other as well, just as the various parts of the body seek the benefit of the other parts. And all of them seek the benefit of the whole.

Paul gave that lesson just before speaking about eating things sacrificed to idols.

### Eating food sacrificed to idols

- **Eat everything being sold in a meat market, inquiring of nothing because of the conscience, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it. If any of those unbelievers invites you, and ye want to go, eat everything being set**

**before you, inquiring of nothing because of the conscience** (First Corinthians 10:25-27).

Jesus abolished all of the laws about the kinds of foods that were clean and the kinds that were unclean. Therefore, we need to have no conscience about what we can eat because no food is forbidden (except for blood). And Paul reinforced what he said by reminding us that the earth and the fullness of it belong to the Lord. Since everything belongs to the Lord then he can certainly allow us to eat whatever we want of it.

Of course, that does not mean we can eat indiscriminately. Whatever we do must be done wisely. For there are always right and wrong ways of doing things. Some foods require more careful preparation before they are eaten, separating or neutralizing the harmful things in them. Some things animals eat are harmful to us and even deadly.

Paul said we were free to eat everything sold as foods without restriction. Therefore, if an unbeliever invites us to dine with him, we are free to eat whatever he offers us without restriction. Of course, that does not mean we *must* eat everything. Paul is simply saying we need have no conscience about whatever we eat, whether it is purchased in a market, whether it is offered to us in a meal, or even if it was offered as a sacrifice to an idol.

### Another man's conscience

- **But if any man says to you, This is a sacrifice to an idol, do not eat for the sake of that man who informed, and the conscience, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it. And I say conscience, not the one of himself, but the one of the other man** (First Corinthians 10:28-29).

Our only restriction to eating is when it involves another man's conscience. If we are with another man who considers some food to be forbidden in some way, then for the sake of his conscience we are not to eat of it. To give a modern example, consider the conscience some Christians have about drinking alcoholic beverages. If we were to find ourselves dining with such a man, perhaps in a restaurant, and he informed us that a certain part of the menu contained beer, wine, or some other alcoholic beverage that he disapproved, then for his sake we should not partake of it.

No food or drink is ever worth offending the conscience of another man. And when we willfully offend that way, we are sinning against God. That is the one moral restriction about things we eat. That is one of the things that limits our liberty in Christ.

### Judge not each other's liberty

- **For why is my liberty judged by another conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I maligned about which I express thanks? Therefore whether ye eat, or drink, or anything ye do, do all to the glory of God** (First Corinthians 10:29-31).

However, Paul is not saying that if a man has a conscience against some food, we should never partake of it. He is saying that when we are with such a man we should restrict what we eat for the sake of his conscience. However, that restriction only applies in his pres-

ence, not wherever we are. As Paul said, **“For why is my liberty judged by another conscience?”**

And it should be understood by the other man whenever we restrict ourselves because of his conscience. We should make clear the reason we are not eating or drinking is because of his conscience not ours. And he needs to understand that if we partake of things with thankfulness, we should not be maligned about which we express thanks.

In other words, the other man needs to know that he has no right over our liberty. It is our regard for his conscience that we do not partake in his presence. For whatever we do we should do all to the glory of God. And it would be good for those around us to know that is our motive.

Nevertheless, if such a man protests to us about our liberty, then we have an opportunity to teach him more fully, using passages like this one from the Bible. As Peter said, **“And always be ready for a defense to every man who asks you a word about the hope in you, with meekness and fear”** (First Peter 3:15).

### Strive to please in all things

- **Become ye inoffensive both to Jews and to Greeks, and to the church of God, just as I also strive to please in all things for all men, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, so that they may be saved. Become ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ** (First Corinthians 10:32-11:1).

We are to be gentlemen in our relationships with both Jews and Gentiles, as well as with our fellow disciples of Christ. We must be thoughtful and considerate to all others, seeking to avoid unnecessary offenses. We must strive to speak and act in ways that are pleasant and approving to everyone—within the bounds of righteousness.

Our goal should be to attract people to the good news of Christ. Our goal should not be to promote our own selfish advantage, but to promote the advantage of society. Our goal should be the salvation of all men. Therefore, we should live in ways that appeal to them as righteous souls who love them and all things that are good and right and just.

That is how our Lord Jesus Christ lived. Nevertheless, it is impossible to be inoffensive in every way to all men. For we are soldiers of God in his war against sin and wickedness. Jesus was persecuted and crucified because he was offensive to the sinful Jews. His apostles were all persecuted because they were offensive to unrepentant sinners. We must **“Fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12).

However, in all other ways we should be inoffensive to all men, striving to be approved by them, striving to bring them to Christ and save their souls. Let them see the power of the good news of Christ in our way of life; power to promote love, peace, joy, truth, and righteousness; power to elevate the spirits of men to make them better for a better world.

### Follow Paul as he follows Christ

- **Now I praise you, brothers, that ye remember me in all things and keep the traditions, just as I delivered them to you** (First Corinthians 11:2).

Paul praised them for remembering him in all things. He had worked with them for a year and a half. For the book of Acts says about him there, **“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). They grew to love him for all the good that he had done, which is no doubt why they remembered him in all things.

Paul also praised them for keeping the traditions, just as he had delivered to them. Jesus often condemned the Jews for their traditions. But those were traditions of men, not of God. And they were using those traditions of men to justify violating commands of God. Remember this example: **“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?”** (Matthew 15:1-3).

There are good traditions and bad traditions. Good traditions are those that are either from the will of God or they help promote the will of God. What Paul delivered to them were traditions that were from the will of God. Any other traditions they had developed were incidental and not required. And so it should be with our traditions.

Traditions can be very helpful in promoting truth and righteousness. They can be edifying and informative. They can strengthen our love for God and for each other. However, they should never violate any part of the will of God, nor should they be divisive or obstructive.

## God, Christ, man, woman

- **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).

Paul now begins to speak about head-coverings for women. And as a preface to his commands about them, he told about the headship of God, Christ, and men. In rank of authority, Paul said that

God is the head of Christ.  
 Christ is the head of every man.  
 Man is the head of a woman.

How could anybody believe in the trinity theory after reading what Paul said about God being the head of Christ? God was the head of Christ on the earth, and he is the head of Christ in heaven. He will always be the head of Christ. Christ is the head of every man, whether on the earth or in heaven. And he will always be the head of every man.

God is one, Christ is one, and the two together are in a special oneness. However, man is the collective name for all men (although sometimes man is the collective name for all mankind, both men and women). When Paul said that man is the head of a woman, he did not mean that every man is the head of every women. For example, I am the head of my wife, but no other man is her head.

Nevertheless, man is the head of a woman because of their subservient role. By nature of being a woman, they are commanded to be in subjection to men. And Paul is here teaching that the head-covering is a symbol of that subjection.

## Head coverings

- **Every man praying or proclaiming the word of God having something upon his head dishonors his head. But every woman praying or proclaiming the word of God with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for it is one and the same thing as the woman who has been shaven. For if a woman is not covered, let her also shear herself. But if it is an ugly thing for a woman to shear herself or be shaven, she should be covered** (First Corinthians 11:4-6).

Paul now speaks about coverings. Our bodies are naked unless we put clothing on them. However, our heads are never naked as long as we have hair on them, because God gave us hair as a covering for our heads. As God gives us hair to cover our heads, so we must put on clothing to cover our bodies.

Regarding what Paul said about head coverings, I first need to mention that every other version of the New Testament I am aware of translates those first words in that passage to say, **“Every man praying or prophesying ... .”** The word prophet is a transliteration of the Greek word PROFHTHS, which means he who is a spokesman for God. Many of the prophets of the Bible spoke from divine inspiration by the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, many of them were seers as well, having the power to foretell future events. Some of them even had other supernatural powers. Nevertheless, their main role was as spokesmen for God. And that is the basic meaning of prophecy.

Since no man now can speak from divine inspiration, or foretell future events with certainty, or has any other kind of supernatural power, then there are no longer any prophets in that sense. However, there are many who have knowledge of the word of God and proclaim what it says. Therefore, anybody who reads, or recites from memory to others from the Holy Bible is a spokesman for God. That is who Paul is speaking about here in these commands about the use of head coverings.

Second, I need to explain the meaning of head-covering because many have misunderstood that covering to be a veil, such as the ones worn by many Muslim women. Paul speaks of the veil in his second letter to the Corinthians (see Second Corinthians 3:13) when he was describing how Moses veiled his face whenever he spoke with the people (see Exodus 34:30-35). A veil is a face-covering, not a head-covering. Paul commanded women to cover their heads, not their faces. Moreover, he did not specify what kind of head-covering was necessary, as long as it was used as a sign of authority over her.

In the above passage Paul makes a clear distinction between the appearance of a man and the appearance of a woman whenever they are speaking to or speaking for God. Whoever prays is speaking *to* God. Whoever speaks the word of God is speaking *for* God.

Although women were commanded to be subservient to men, there were some who spoke the word of God. However, in order to make a public display of their subservience to men, they were commanded to have their heads covered whenever they did. And those commands apply to us today.

Whenever a woman (even in the presence of only children or other women) speaks the word of God she should have her head covered. It is an important sign of her subservience to men. And that subservience is exceedingly important. Just look at the social destruction caused by the so-called feminist movement.

The command for a woman to have her head covered was for both proclaiming the word of God and praying. And Paul emphasized the importance of it by comparing her uncovered head to a bald head, which is indeed an ugly thing for a woman. This perverse generation has occasionally tried to make a woman's bald head to be fashionable. It never works, because it is too perverse. It makes a woman ugly, and what woman wants to make herself look ugly?

Therefore, if a woman prays or speaks the word of God with her head uncovered, it makes her just as ugly as if her head were bald. Therefore, as Paul said, "... **she should be covered.**" But alas virtually all modern American women are disobeying that command. They are following the sinful world, and the men are justifying them.

That may not cause a woman to be lost. Nevertheless, remember what Jesus said about relaxing the commandments: "**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**" (Matthew 5:19).

Although he was speaking to the Jews about the law of Moses, what he said about the effect of relaxing God's commandments applies to us as well. Therefore, beware lest you find yourself being called least in the kingdom of the heavens. It takes no effort for a woman to cover her head as a sign of subservience, but it does take a lot of humility, especially in this rebellious generation.

Notice how Paul said that "**every woman praying or proclaiming the word of God with her head uncovered dishonors her head.**" Remember, he also said that "**the head of a woman is the man.**" Hence, every woman praying or proclaiming the word of God with her head uncovered dishonors the man. It is not a coincidence that when women began to rebel from men (with the rise of the so-called feminist movement), women quit covering their heads when praying and proclaiming the word of God. And there are many other ways they show their contempt for the headship of men.

I think it providential that Jewish men now do not pray without having something on their head. They call those coverings prayer shawls. It is a manifestation of them rejecting and dishonoring Christ, although they are no doubt unaware of that significance.

## Men are superior to women

- **For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, being an image and glory of God, but woman is a glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. For also man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man** (First Corinthians 11:7-9).

As women are commanded to cover their heads that way, so also men are commanded to keep their heads uncovered. That visible distinction between men and women symbolizes

their different relationship with God and with each other. In the above passage Paul is showing how upon the earth God made man superior to woman. And he gave three Bible facts of it (in heaven there will be no such distinctions):

Man is an image and glory of God, but woman is a glory of man.

Man is not from woman, but woman from man.

Man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man.

The original passages about those things are from the book of Genesis where it describes the creation. The first one says, **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27).

The first part of that passage says that God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him. Notice how the two pronouns his and him are both masculine. For it was Adam who was first created. And since the woman (later called Eve) was created from Adam then both men and women are in the image of God. Nevertheless, as Paul said, they were not created as equals, anymore than man is equal with God.

This next passage from Genesis describes why and how the woman was created: **“And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a help meet for him. ... And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. And God took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in place of it. And the rib, which Jehovah God had taken from the man, he made a woman, and brought her to the man. 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”** (Genesis 2:18-23).

From the very beginning it has been God’s will that women serve men and be in subjection to them. And having their heads covered when they pray and speak the word of God is a sign of that subjection. And when she does not, she is dishonoring her head, which is the man. In contrast, if a man prays and speaks the word of God with his head covered he is dishonoring his head, which is Christ.

In the last years of my teaching at Harding University, I witnessed some male students during chapel services with their heads covered and all female students with their heads uncovered. Actually, I cannot ever remember seeing a woman in chapel with her head covered, but I did see a few men with their heads covered. It is ironic that in chapel the men with their heads covered were publicly rebuked from the platform of the auditorium by the university president and commanded to uncover them, but nothing was ever said to the women students for having their heads uncovered.

The arguments I heard that they used to dismiss the command about head coverings for women were similar to the kind of arguments used to dismiss the necessity of immersion in water for remission of sins. And as far as I know the hearts of most believers are now as hardened against the command for head coverings for women as are the hearts of those who are against the rite of immersion in water. It grieves me to see how the spirit of the world has blinded their eyes to the truth and led them astray into increasing disobedience.

## Authority over her head

- **Because of this the woman ought to have authority over her head, because of the agents** (First Corinthians 11:10).

This is another commonly misunderstood passage in the Bible. Paul is here simply giving a reason why women are to have their heads covered when praying or proclaiming the word of God. Remember, that covering is a sign of the authority of men over them. For without submitting to that authority, any head-covering would be nothing but something on the head with no other meaning. That is why the kind of covering used is irrelevant (within the bounds of serving its purpose). It is a symbol of her submission to the authority of men. It is a statement that she recognizes that authority over her. (Alas not long before modern women quit covering their heads, the coverings they used became more of a “fashion statement” than obedience to that command.)

And Paul said that submission is important because of the agents, the heavenly agents. It is important because of the relationship of the agents with God and with us. For just as God made man superior to women on the earth, so God will make man superior to the agents in heaven. (Remember, there are no sex differences in heaven, nor will there be.)

As sons of God we will reign in heaven with Christ. For Jesus 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). And that will include reigning over the heavenly agents. Remember, Paul said we were even going to judge them: **“Know ye not that we will judge agents?”** (First Corinthians 6:3).

Therefore, if women rebel against the authority of men upon the earth, how can they expect the agents to submit to their authority in heaven? Women need to have authority over their heads, which authority is that of men over them. And the head-covering symbolizes their submission to that authority. Their submission is an important example for the heavenly agents, an example for them to submit to the authority of mankind in heaven (former men and women). They must submit to us because we will be sons of God reigning with Christ in his throne.

## Our mutual dependence

- **Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is through the woman. But all things are from God** (First Corinthians 11:11-12).

Paul is here no doubt trying to prevent men from being puffed up over women. He reminds us that men and women are not independent of each other in the Lord. For just as the first woman came from the man Adam, so also men are now conceived and born through women. Hence, our mutual existence depends upon each other.

But Paul also reminds us that all things are from God. The entire world, as well as all of mankind, both men and women, are from God. For he created all things, and it is his power that sustains all things. Thus, we are dependent most of all upon him.

## Long hair

- **Judge ye among yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered? Or does not nature itself teach you that if a man actually wears**

**long hair it is a disgrace to him? But if a woman wears long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair has been given for a mantle** (First Corinthians 11:13-15).

In the above passage Paul uses the natural difference in how we wear our hair to illustrate why a woman should not pray to God uncovered. He tells us what every sensible man knows: that long hair on a man is a disgrace to him. Paul said nature itself teaches that. Long hair on a man is a perversity. It is no coincidence that as men become more wild and barbaric the more they wear long hair. The most civilized and refined men keep their hair short. And if they do let it grow, they tie it up so that it does not look long.

On the other hand when a woman wears long hair it is a glory to her; it enhances her beauty. And cultured women strive to display the beauty of their long hair. It is a perversity when women cut their hair short like men. And it is no coincidence that as the country has become more pagan and barbaric the more women are wearing short hair.

Paul said a woman's hair has been given for a mantle. The Greek word for mantle is PERIBOLAIΟΥ. It is different from the Greek word for covered, which is KATAKALUPTETAI.

Those who seek to dismiss Paul's command about women praying with their heads covered confuse the two kinds of coverings; they deny the two different kinds. But the fact that Paul chose two different Greek words clearly indicates he is speaking about two different kinds of coverings: the natural covering of her hair and an added covering when a woman prays or speaks the word of God. Thus, he used the two different words PERIBOLAIΟΥ and KATAKALUPTETAI.

A woman's long hair is a glory to her and was given for a mantle or a vesture. Remember, Paul said that every man praying or proclaiming the word of God having something upon his head dishonors his head, which is Christ. Does that include his hair? Did he mean that men must be bald when we pray or speak the word of God? Of course not. Paul was no more speaking about hair when he commanded women to have their heads covered, than he was speaking about hair when he commanded men to have their heads uncovered.

A woman's hair has been given to her head to cover its nakedness. It serves as a lovely mantle for her at all times. However, during those times when a woman prays or speaks the word of God, she must add another covering over her hair as a sign of her submission to her head, which is the man. That command was clearly understood and obeyed for many centuries until the perversity of recent times.

## No such custom

- **But if any man appears to be a lover of strife, we have no such custom, nor the congregations of God** (First Corinthians 11:16).

The custom Paul refers to here is the custom of ignoring whether a woman's head is covered or not during prayer or proclaiming the word of God (to children or to other women). That is the very custom that has become popular during this adulterous generation: the custom of ignoring whether her head is covered or not. Paul said he and his co-workmen had no such custom, nor did any of the congregations of God.

Those who oppose Paul's command about head-coverings have also perverted this passage to say the custom was about men and women differing in the matter of head coverings. It is ridiculous to say that Paul spent all this time giving commands about head-coverings, and then say it is a custom they do not have because it makes no difference.

Modern men and women have turned Paul's words upside down, because they hate that difference, and they want to justify themselves for ignoring the commands about it.

## Other divisions among them

- **Now in this that is commanded, I do not praise you, because ye do not assemble for the better but for the worse. 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 11:17-19).

Paul had earlier said, "**Now I praise you, brothers ...**," and he gave the reason why. However, now he said he did not praise them, which was a gentle way of saying he was rebuking them. He did not praise them because their assemblies were not for the better but for the worse because he heard there were divisions among them.

Remember, after his salutation Paul rebuked the disciples at Corinth for having divisions among them, which divisions he said were contentions: "**Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but ye may be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding.**

**"For it was declared to me about you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 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?"** (First Corinthians 1:10-13).

Now Paul speaks about other divisions, which he said were factions. Perhaps these divisions were less divisive than the one about them belonging to different men, because he said of those divisions, "**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?"** (First Corinthians 3:3-4).

These other divisions were about how they were conducting the memorial supper of the Lord, which Paul called the Lord's supper. They were not united in how they were conducting that ceremony. They had made it factious instead of unifying.

Paul said he partly believed it because there also must be factions among them. That sounds strange because Jesus prayed for our unity. However, Paul gave the reason why we must have factions among us. He said it was so that the genuine may become apparent among us. That means there will always be some among the disciples of Christ in the world who are not genuine.

The first part of the book of Revelation tells how Jesus sent judgments about and instructions for the seven congregations of Asia. In some of those congregations there were members who were not genuine, and the Lord rebuked them.

That is a very important thing for us to recognize. It is important to recognize because otherwise there will be no efforts made to maintain and improve our unity in Christ. Every disciple must be vigilant to expose those who are not genuine in our congregations, and either correct them or drive them out, as is taught in the words of Jesus to those seven congregations of Asia. And this letter of Paul is another example.

There are times in most people's life when we deserve praise, and times when we deserve criticism. And it is our duty to encourage each other with praise when it is deserved, and to criticize when that is deserved. Too often brothers in Christ fear to criticize each other, but Paul did not let fear keep him from it. Criticizing people when they deserve it is an act of love, because Jesus said, "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent**" (Revelation 3:19).

### Eating the Lord's supper wrongfully

- **When therefore ye come together in the same place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For each man proceeds to eat his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunken. For have ye no houses to eat and to drink in? Or do ye disparage the church of God, and humiliate those not having? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you** (First Corinthians 11:20-22).

Although they were assembling together to partake of the Lord's supper, Paul said it was not really the Lord's supper. It was not the true Lord's supper because they were not observing it right. And that is another important lesson for us. When we do things that Christ commands us, if they are not done right, then we are not recognized as doing them at all. It is not just the intent that counts.

Those disciples were treating the Lord's supper like a picnic meal, each one bringing his own food. Hence, some were well fed, some were ill fed, and some were even drunken. Paul then asked them four questions:

Have ye no houses to eat and to drink in?

Or do ye disparage the church of God, and humiliate those not having?

What shall I say to you?

Shall I praise you in this?

With those questions he was rebuking them. They no doubt did have houses to eat and drink in. They were certainly disparaging the church of God, and humiliating those not having. Asking them what he should say to them was a way of having them think more carefully about what they were doing.

Paul answered for himself his last question about praising them, by saying, "**I do not praise you.**" Each of those four questions was a rebuke because they were observing the Lord's supper wrongfully.

They deserved all the more being rebuked because some of them were so irreverent in their observance that they even became drunken from the wine. And the congregation obviously tolerated that kind of revelry by some of them as part of the memorial.

### Why and how it is done

- **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).

That is the fourth description of how Jesus instituted the ceremony of the Lord's supper. As is usual in the Bible each one differs slightly from the other, but none of them are contradictory. Each one adds something different to the description, so that by reading all four we can get a more complete description of what happened.

Below are the descriptions given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The biography of Jesus by the apostle John does not mention 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 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** (Mark 14:22-24).

**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).

See my comments about the Lord's supper in Matthew 26:26-29. All that Paul adds to those descriptions in the biographies of Jesus is the statement Jesus made about the breaking of bread during that supper symbolizing his body being broken for them. Paul also added these words: **"For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."**

Paul was not present during the last supper when that ceremony was established. However, he indicated it was told him by the Lord when he was given the knowledge of the good news that he needed to proclaim it. For the first thing he said before describing when Jesus instituted the Lord's supper was, **"I received from the Lord what I also delivered**

to you ... .” Paul delivered to them the words of the good news of Christ, including the ceremony of the Lord’s supper.

### Eat and drink it worthily

- **Therefore, whoever may eat this bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily of the Lord, will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and let him so eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.**
- **For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. Because of this many are weak and sickly among you, and a considerable sleep** (First Corinthians 11:27-30).

Those words show how extremely important it is to observe the Lord’s supper the right way and with great reverence. Eating of that bread or drinking of the cup of the Lord unworthily of the Lord makes a man guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

Our Lord gave his body and shed his blood for our salvation. It was necessary for his body to be broken and his blood to be shed, because that was the only way he could complete his perfect obedience to the Father, thus enabling him to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. And since the bread and the fruit of the vine that we partake in the Lord’s supper symbolize his broken body and his shed blood, then partaking of those things unworthily of him shows contempt for his broken body and his shed blood.

Thus, in a figurative way, partaking of it wrongfully makes a man guilty of breaking the body and shedding the blood of the Lord. He becomes just as guilty as if he himself literally broke the body and shed the blood of the Lord. That is a very serious offense. It means he **“eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.”** Which condemnation caused some of them to become weak and sickly, and a considerable slept (in death).

It is a very serious offense. It ranks with those who are **“crucifying to themselves the Son of God, and disgracing him publicly”** (Hebrews 6:6). For eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord unworthily makes a man guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord, disgracing him publicly.

Paul said such a man was guilty of not discerning the body of the Lord. Those who partake unworthily are treating the bread and the fruit of the vine as simply food and drink to indulge themselves. They do not treat those things for what they symbolize, the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord. They do not discern the Lord’s body in that ceremony.

### Discerning ourselves so as not to be judged

- **But if we were discerning ourselves we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned with the world** (First Corinthians 11:31-32).

When we discern ourselves we are evaluating what we do. We examine ourselves. We study ourselves so that we can determine if we are doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. And when we use the teachings of the Bible as our standard for discerning ourselves then we *will* do what is right and avoid what is wrong.

However, when we do not discern ourselves, then we are judged by the Lord. And we will be judged by him because failing to discern ourselves leads us into doing things that are wrong. And when that happens **“we are chastened so that we may not be condemned with the world.”** He chastens us because he loves us.

The author of the book of Hebrews said about our chastening, **“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? And if ye are without chastening, of which all have become participants, then ye are bastards, and not sons. Besides, we indeed have had chastisers—the fathers of our flesh—and we were turned around. Shall we not much more be subordinate to the Father of the spirits, and we will live? For those men indeed for a few days chastened us according to that which seemed good to them, but he for that which is advantageous, in order to be partakers of his holiness.**

**“But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:5-11).

God punishes unrepentant sinners in various ways. But he does not chasten them because they are not his sons (or the lost sheep of Christ). Their final punishment is the condemnation of eternal damnation. God chastens us so that we will repent and not be condemned with them.

## The Lord's supper is not for hunger

- **Therefore, my brothers, when ye come together to eat, await each other. And if any man is hungry, let him eat at home so that ye may not come together for condemnation. And the rest I will set in order as soon as I come** (First Corinthians 11:33-34).

The terrible way they were observing the Lord's supper was apparently so chaotic that they were all eating and drinking at different times. Hence, Paul had to command them to await each other so they could have an orderly and dignified ceremony.

With those words in that passage he was telling them that the Lord's supper was not a meal to satisfy hunger. It was a simple memorial ceremony that symbolized the broken body and shed blood of our Lord. For his broken body and shed blood was spiritual nourishment for our souls. As bread and fruit of the vine nourishes our bodies to keep them alive, so also the broken body and shed blood of Jesus enabled us to have eternal life.

Paul gave one more warning about the danger of observing that ceremony wrongfully. Doing it wrongfully would mean that their assembling together would not be to strengthen their spirits, but to condemn them.

What Paul meant by saying, “... **the rest I will set in order as soon as I come,**” is not clear. Perhaps he meant he would further instruct them about an orderly way to observe the Lord’s supper. No details are given about that because we are not commanded a specific time and way. As long as we observe that ceremony with order and reverence, we are free to vary the incidental details about it. Nevertheless, whatever he meant is not important to us, or the Holy Spirit would have included that information.

### Concerning spiritual things

- **Now concerning the spiritual things, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. Ye know that, while Gentiles, ye were being carried away to the voiceless idols, as ye were led** (First Corinthians 12:1-2).

Paul now begins to give detailed information about gifts of the Holy Spirit. He was giving those details because he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual things. As Gentiles they had been carried away to the inanimate idols. They had worshiped them as gods, believing those idols had spiritual powers. In fact they are nothing but blocks of metal, wood, and stone with no powers at all. Nor do they represent anything spiritual.

### Speaking by the Spirit of God

- **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).

Now that passage does not mean anyone who mouths the words “Jesus is Lord” is doing so by the Holy Spirit, because sinners cannot receive it (see John 14:17). That expression only refers to the child of God who has the Holy Spirit within him and allows it to guide him to live righteously. Those words apply to a man who is committed to Jesus as Lord, and proves it by his faith and his obedience. For Jesus said, “**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**” (Matthew 7:21).

Paul also said to Titus about some men who profess to know God, “**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).

Such men may mouth the right words, but God’s Holy Spirit does not reside in them. He is not in them because their hearts are far from him. As Jesus said about such men, “**This people comes near me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips, but their heart is far distant from me**” (Matthew 15:8).

The Holy Spirit only resides in the disciples of Christ, and no genuine disciple can say in his heart that Jesus is accursed. He may utter the words for some purpose, or write them as I am doing, but he cannot himself ever curse Jesus, not a genuine disciple that has the Holy Spirit in him.

And having the Holy Spirit in us helps energize us to live righteously. It energizes us in two ways. One way is by our knowledge of the word of God, which was given to us by prophets who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. And that knowledge in us is a living knowledge. It is a form of neurological energy in our brains. And that special energy or spirit is a result of learning the word of God.

The second way the Holy Spirit helps us live righteously is through the influence of our consciences. Having knowledge is not enough; it must be applied to be useful. And our conscience motivates us, and energizes us to apply our knowledge of the word of God so that we can bring forth fruits of righteousness.

I say much more about the Spirit of God, including his Holy Spirit, in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### Many gifts, services, functions, but one Spirit

- **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** (First Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul mentioned varieties of gifts, services, and functions, but it is the same Spirit, Lord, and God who works all in all. God is who works in all of us for all of those activities. He works in us through our knowledge of his holy word, and by our love for him. Every organization needs members with various talents, services, and functions, because every organization requires specialization. As Paul says later, the church is like a body, with many body-parts serving differently giving strength to the whole body.

### Different gifts of the Spirit for different men

- **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 translation of tongues** (First Corinthians 12:7-10).

Paul listed nine manifestations of the Spirit: gifts, services, and functions that were given through the Holy Spirit of God. There are varieties of them, but the one and the same Spirit works all of them. For the Spirit is the energy or power within us that enables those things to happen. It works together with us in our hearts. For without our willingness the Holy Spirit will give us nothing. I explain in much more detail how the energy of God

operates in us, and in the world in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. Here is the list of gifts of the Spirit that Paul gave:

- The word of wisdom
- The word of knowledge
- Faith
- Gifts of healing
- Workings of miracles
- Prophecy
- Discerning of spirits
- Kinds of tongues
- The interpretation of tongues

Those manifestations of the Spirit are distributed to each man individually as the Spirit wills, to some men more to some men less. Paul may have been given all of them. However, God's Son Jesus Christ was given all of them without measure. For John the immerse said about him, **"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 3:24-35).

The word of wisdom refers to the ability to understand and know how best to apply knowledge. The word of knowledge refers to the ability to retain information. Regarding faith, remember what Paul said to the Romans about it: **"God has apportioned to each man a measure of faith"** (Romans 12:3). Remember also that the word of God is our source of faith: **"So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17). Therefore, how much faith we have depends upon both our accessibility to the word of God and our receptiveness to it.

Most of the miracles performed during New Testament times were healings. When Paul listed workings of miracles separately he was no doubt referring to other kinds of miracles. For example, Paul struck the sorcerer who was opposing him with temporary blindness (see Acts 13:11).

Gifts of healing and workings of miracles are no longer given. Nevertheless, through the centuries there have been some disciples of the devil who disguised themselves as workers for Christ, and claimed to have supernatural power to heal. A few of them have become rich and famous. They are very shrewd manipulators of people's minds, using many devices to deceive. Every serious effort to confirm their claims has failed. They leave behind them a trail of bitterness and disappointment by desperate souls who had put hope in them. Therefore, be ye not deceived.

Prophecy is proclaiming the word of God. And since the New Testament had not yet been written in those days, the word of God was still being given to some men by divine inspiration. Prophecy now only means proclaiming the word of God from what is contained in the Bible.

Discerning of spirits probably meant the ability to judge the character of people, whether they belong to God or not. That was an important ability because they did not yet have the New Testament as a standard by which to judge. And there were evil men who tried to pretend they were Christians.

For example, Paul said, **“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).

Kinds of tongues refers to the ability of a man to speak a foreign language he never learned. And the interpretation of tongues was the ability to understand what was being said in that foreign language. Those were also supernatural abilities that were only given before the New Testament was written. They were given to prove the authenticity of the good news of Christ, that it is from God.

### The same Spirit works them all

- **But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each man individually as it wills** (First Corinthians 12:11).

All of the varieties of spiritual gifts, services, and functions were from the one Holy Spirit of God. That spirit enabled different men to have those different abilities. And they were distributed as the Spirit chose. That means the Spirit of God was guaranteeing the development of the early church. It was guaranteeing its development by endowing various disciples with important gifts, services, and functions, many of which involved supernatural powers.

### One body

- **For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ** (First Corinthians 12:12).

The one body is the church of Jesus Christ. And Paul used the example of our body of flesh, which has many parts to it, to show how the church has many members in it but only one body. And as the parts of our body work together in unity, so also the members of the church should work together in unity. There is great strength in unity, which is why the devil works continuously to keep the believers in Christ divided.

### One Spirit

- **For also by one Spirit we are all immersed into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or freemen, and we were all made to drink into one Spirit** (First Corinthians 12:13).

We are literally immersed into the one body of Christ when we repent of our sins and are buried in water for the remission of them. And we are figuratively immersed when we become part of the body of Christ, the church. We all become united in the body of Christ,

regardless of our race or nationality, regardless of our status in life. We all become part of that great international brotherhood, the kingdom of God.

And that happens through the power of the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. As by one Spirit we are all immersed into one body, so also we are all made to drink into one Spirit. When we drink something we bring it into our body. And when we put on Christ through immersion in water the Holy Spirit enters into our bodies. That is the gift of the Spirit that Peter spoke about on the day of Pentecost, when he said, **“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, not a gift from the Holy Spirit. And being made to drink into that one Spirit means it lives within us as a helper to keep us a spiritually healthy part of the body of Christ. 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).

## Many parts but one body

- **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. And if they were all one part, where would be the body?**
- **But now of course there are many body-parts, but one body** (First Corinthians 12:14-20).

There is not only strength in unity, there is also strength in specialization. For, as Paul said, there would be no body if only one part comprised the whole. Also regarding diversity, it is only a strength when there is specialization and unity.

Therefore, God has organized the body of Christ, the church, to have many different parts, which are called gifts, services, and functions. And each part must serve and function for its purpose. What kind of body would there be if the different parts quarreled about how they would function? What kind of body would there be if the different parts decided to compete with other parts?

In order for the health and strength of the church, which is the body of Christ, we must work faithfully in the part we have been given. For example, it is folly when women strive to serve the parts that men have been given. It is chaos when all the members strive to be the leaders. It is satanic when one man is given all the authority.

Nevertheless, unlike a body of flesh, many members of the body of Christ can perform different services and functions as the needs arise. Moreover, many can grow and develop for the higher roles. However, women can never become men to serve the services and functions of men; all such efforts otherwise are gross perversity.

### All the parts need each other

- **And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Instead, much more the parts of the body that seem to be more feeble are necessary. And those things of the body presumed to be without esteem, we place around these more abundant regard. And our unrepresentable parts have more abundant propriety, whereas our representable parts have no need** (First Corinthians 12:21-24).

Paul continues comparing the church to an organism. Just as each part of a body of flesh is dependent upon the other parts, so also each of us depend upon each other in the church, the body of Christ. We sometimes do not appreciate our mutual dependence until we lose a member. Then we discover that any loss among us is grievous, and it weakens us.

Paul said that even the lowly things of the body have a special kind of credit: Instead, much more the parts of the body that seem to be more feeble are necessary. And those things of the body presumed to be without esteem, we place around these more abundant regard. And our unrepresentable parts have more abundant propriety, whereas our representable parts have no need.

The eyes of the body are very feeble and require careful protection. Yet they are very important. Examples of feeble parts of the church being necessary are elderly women. They are naturally more feeble, and yet they are very important for the wisdom they have to share with the younger women. Another example is children. They are a very important part of every congregation in the psychological sense. For it is depressing and saddening to the spirit of a congregation when it has no children.

An example of things of the body presumed to be without esteem are a man's feet. For what man proudly displays his feet to be admired? Yet they are very important, especially the big toe for balance. Therefore, we give our feet abundant regard. We shelter them with shoes, and try to avoid injuring them.

Examples in the church of those presumed to be without esteem are perhaps those who are handicapped in ways that limit their usefulness. Nevertheless, we give them special consideration.

Our unrepresentable body parts have more abundant propriety. Several year ago I learned about a waste processing plant in Japan that was well concealed. It was also designed to have an earth roof, which was then cultivated to be a lovely public park where people could go for recreation. That country took something that was a repulsive but necessary place, and designed it to also serve as a desirable place.

As part of God's master engineering of our bodies, he had already done the same thing. He took the area of our bodies that is used to expel the repulsive waste, and designed it to also be the area for the pleasures of mating and the joy of bringing new souls into the world.

Examples of unpresentable things in the church that are given more abundant propriety are emotional and personal things in people's lives that should not be made public. When people are struggling with emotional and personal trials and tribulations, it is our duty to help them in discrete ways whenever we are able, and not publicize such things unnecessarily.

### The same care for each other

- **Instead, God united the body together, having given more abundant regard to the part that lacks, so that there would be no schisms in the body, but that the parts would have the same care for each other. And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer together, or one part is honored, all the parts rejoice together** (First Corinthians 12:24-26).

We all know how united together our bodies are. We care for all of our parts, whether they are strong or weak parts, public or private parts, tough or tender parts. We care for them all so there is no quarreling or envy among our body parts. They work together in harmony. And as Paul said, if one part suffers the whole body suffers; if one part is honored the whole body rejoices.

And that is how it should be with the body of Christ, the church. We should treat each other the way our body parts treat each other. We should do things like this: **“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”** (Romans 12:15-16). There should be no quarreling or envy. All such things among us should be quickly healed by the whole body. Every member of the church should love every other member.

### Together we are the body of Christ

- **Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually. And in the church God has placed men who are first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues** (First Corinthians 12:27-28).

After describing all of those characteristics of our bodies of flesh Paul then told how we **“are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually.”** However, as you have seen in this commentary I have already taken the liberty to give examples of how those things apply to the body of Christ, the church.

Paul applied those things about the body to the different gifts, services, and functions of the church. Perhaps he gave this lesson in order to prevent foolish competition and envy among members about having different abilities.

He spoke of how in the church God had placed men who are first apostles, secondly prophets, and thirdly teachers. The word apostle means someone who is sent on a mission. Prophets are those who are spokesmen for God. Teachers are those who communicate the knowledge that was received from prophets of God.

There are no more apostles, nor will there be. There are no more prophets who are divinely inspired. The only prophets now are those who proclaim the word of God from the Bible.

And those in the church who now teach must teach what they learn from that source, either directly from the Bible or indirectly from someone else who knows it. The Bible is our only authority for the word of God because it contains the record of what Jesus and his apostles taught.

Apostles, prophets, and teachers all shared the word of God with others. Apostles were first because they were prophets who first spoke the word of God, and were active evangelists for Christ. Prophets were second because they spoke the word of God but were not sent out as apostles. Teachers were third because they shared the word of God from what they received from the apostles and the prophets.

After those three things Paul listed five other gifts, services, and functions: miracles, gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and kinds of tongues. As with prophecy, miracles and gifts of healing are no longer given. They were given before the New Testament was written to prove the good news of Christ is from God. The New Testament record is now proof enough for those who are humble, open minded, and love truth and righteousness.

Regarding helps, since the Holy Spirit was called the helper, helps probably refer to the many different ways members can serve to assist in performing the activities of the church. Helpers are useful in virtually every human endeavor. Although they serve in a secondary capacity, nevertheless, they perform an important function.

Administrations no doubt refer to the many activities associated with managing the affairs of congregational activities. The church of Jesus Christ does not have an elaborate system of government. Husbands manage their own wives and children; the elders of each congregation oversee the activities of their congregation; and Christ our Lord is the head of us all, managing us through his commands and examples that are recorded in the Bible.

And remember, kinds of tongues refer to the gift of being able to speak a foreign language that was never learned. And that gift too no longer exists because it is no longer needed.

## Do all do everything?

- **Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all do miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all translate? But be zealous for the better gifts** (First Corinthians 12:27-31).

With those questions Paul is saying that not everybody does everything. Just as the body parts specialize in their service, so also we as members of the church perform much better when we specialize in some kind of activity. Both unity and specialization of function are required for the higher functioning of any group or system. Therefore, we must be content to limit the extent of our work together, and not try to do everything. There is a modern proverb that says, He who strives to do everything does nothing well.

It is good to be zealous for service. But be zealous to always do well, and not try to do everything. Therefore, we should be zealous in our special kind of service. However, Paul did say we should be zealous for the better gifts. Remember, he ranked the first three gifts in his list of them, when he said, **“And in the church God has placed men who are first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers ...”** (First Corinthians 12:28). Those were probably “the better gifts.”

Remember however, there are no longer any apostles. Nevertheless, some sinful men claim they have inherited that office. They claim to have received it by “apostolic succession.” But the Bible gives no support whatsoever for that claim. Such men are proud, presumptuous, and aggressive men who want to lord over others.

Paul warned of such men, when he said to the elders at Ephesus, **“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).

Beware of them, because they are wolves in sheep’s clothing. They appear pious and authentic, but underneath they are like the Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked. He called them hypocrites, and said woe to them. And he gave the reason why, saying to them, **“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).

### Even the best is nothing without love

- **And yet I show you a more excellent way. If I speak with the tongues of men and of agents, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a clashing cymbal.**
- **And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.**
- **And if I dole out all things possessed by me, and if I deliver my body so that I may be burned, and have not love, I benefit nothing** (First Corinthians 12:31-13:3).

Being zealous for the spiritual gifts, services, and functions, for the cause of Christ and his church is good. But Paul told of a more excellent way, the way to serve the cause of Christ and his church. That way is to have love in your heart, the genuine kind of love that Christ has. It is a more excellent way because without it nothing else means anything.

Paul gave five examples of doing great things in the service of Christ and his church:

- If I speak with the tongues of men and of agents
- If I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge
- If I have all faith so as to remove mountains
- If I dole out all things possessed by me
- If I deliver my body so that I may be burned

And for each one of those great things he said that doing them would have no value to the man if he had no love. Without love, having powerful speech would only mean he was making loud noise. Without love, even if he had divine wisdom and great faith, he would still be nothing. Without love, he could even sacrificed himself completely, but it would benefit him nothing.

What greater abilities would a man want? What greater sacrifices could he make? Yet without love they would all be meaningless and useless to him. Since love is so important Paul then used many words to describe what love is.

## What love does and does not do

- **Love is patient and is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not brag, and is not puffed up. It does not behave improperly, does not seek the things of itself, is not made sharp, does not contemplate evil, does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the truth, covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things** (First Corinthians 13:4-7).

In his description of love, Paul spoke both of things that love does and does not do. Here are seven things he said that love does:

- Love is patient.
- Love is kind.
- Love rejoices in the truth.
- Love covers all things.
- Love believes all things.
- Love hopes all things.
- Love endures all things.

Being patient means enduring difficulty without complaint. Being kind means treating someone well and doing them good. Love rejoices in the truth because the truth is what enables us to be productive. Love covers all things by embracing and protecting. Love believes all things in the sense of accepting the truth of God and his righteousness. Love hopes all things in the sense of both desiring and anticipating the growth and development of things that are good, right, and just. Love endures all things by never giving up and quitting, or never becoming hateful and destructive.

Here are eight things he said that love does not do:

- Love does not envy.
- Love does not brag.
- Love is not puffed up.
- Love does not behave improperly.
- Love does not seek the things of itself.
- Love is not made sharp.
- Love does not contemplate evil.
- Love does not rejoice in wrong.

Envy is wanting to take away something that belongs to someone else. And love would never do that. Bragging is boasting about yourself that is both false and undeserved, elevating yourself unjustly above others. And love would never do that. Being puffed up means becoming proud and arrogant. It is an unjustified attitude that you are better than other people. And love would never do that, because pride is a root cause of all evil.

Improper behavior means doing things that are wrong, and wrong things are always harmful. And love would never do that. Seeking the things of itself refers to selfishness, and there is no love in selfishness. Therefore, love would never do that. Being made sharp is a form of cruelty, inflicting pain with roughness and harshness, like a cutting blade. The cruelty of sharpness can be done with words or deeds. And love would never do either one.

Contemplating evil means planning and plotting it, which eventually leads to doing it. Therefore, love never contemplates evil, because evil is always hurtful and destructive. Love does not rejoice in wrong, because it has no pleasure in wrong. Indeed, for love, wrong is loathsome and offensive. When the American people decided to forsake God and become pagan, they began to rejoice in wrong, and they still do it. They glorify wrong and take pleasure in it. They laugh about it when they should be groaning. Love never rejoices in wrong.

## Love never fails

- **Love never fails. But whether prophecies, they will be abolished, whether tongues, they will cease, whether knowledge, it will be abolished** (First Corinthians 13:8).

Prophecies, in the sense of speaking from divine inspiration, have already been abolished, and tongues have already ceased. Those things passed away with the development of the New Testament record, and they are no longer needed. Prophecy in the sense of the word of God itself will never be abolished, because Jesus said, **“The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away”** (Matthew 24:35). Earthly knowledge will be abolished because the sky and the earth will pass away, and God will make all things new.

## When the perfect comes

- **But we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, then what is in part will be abolished** (First Corinthians 13:9-10).

The perfect will be the new Jerusalem in heaven where all the sons of God will live with him and his Son Jesus Christ. And that will not come until the end of the world. Therefore, before that time we only know in part. For mankind is not capable of knowing anything except in part, regardless of how much they labor to know.

Regarding prophesying in part, remember prophesying is proclaiming the word of God. And even the greatest prophets only spoke the word of God in part. Indeed, as with all human knowledge, our knowledge of the word of God cannot be said to be complete. The knowledge we have of the word of God that has been given to us in the record of the Bible is sufficient. For the apostle 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).

## When a child, when a man

- **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).

The childish things that Paul abolished with himself when he became a man was a result of his immaturity. He abolished speaking like a child, understanding like a child, and reasoning like a child. Children tend to speak impulsively without reflection. The understanding and reasoning of a child is very shallow and often erroneous. Paul abolished those things with himself, and we should do the same with ourselves. We should speak maturely, carefully with plenty of forethought. Our understanding and reasoning should be based upon clearly established evidence of all related circumstances.

### Now dimness, then clearly

- **For now we see by polished metal, in dimness, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know just as also I was known** (First Corinthians 13:12).

The mirrors they made in those ancient times were polished metal. Hence, the reflections from them were hazy and dim, and not sharp and clear. That is the way we now see the two realities: the earthly world and the heavenly world. But in the afterlife we will see sharply and clearly, as in face to face. We will be able to understand many things we cannot now.

What Paul said about himself is true of us all. In this life everything we know is in part. Even the greatest scholars and scientists only know in part. None of them know fully, and the honest men among them admit it. But in the afterlife in heaven we will know more fully. We will know as we were known.

Remember what Jesus said about knowing us: **“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered”** (Matthew 10:30). What man knows the exact number of hairs of his head? God knows every detail about us, and in the afterlife we will know even such details. Our knowledge will be far richer and deeper. And it will be given to us as a gift. We will not need to struggle to acquire our knowledge as we do here in this world.

### The greater is love

- **And now remain faith, hope, love, these three, but the greater of these is love** (First Corinthians 13:13).

Faith, hope, and love will always remain, even in the afterlife. Our faith will remain because faith is more than simple believing. Faith is believing and trusting. And as sons of God for eternity we will always trust our beloved Creator and heavenly Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. That faith will never pass away.

Likewise our hope will always remain. Our hope will remain because we will always be creating new things with God himself. God is not going to ever stop creating. And as we work in heaven with him we anticipate the continual creation and development of new and greater things. The devil and those deceived by him would have us believe that all we will do is sit on the grass and sing praises to God. But remember, Jesus said the devil **“is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44).

Faith and hope in God are indeed great virtues, but love is greater. Love is a good feeling, a positive attitude, and a helpful and constructive way of behaving toward someone or

something else. Love is greater than all of the other virtues because it is their foundation. When Jesus was asked what was the great commandment of the law, he said, **“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).

Indeed, the apostle John said about God himself, **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16). Love is the heart and soul of all that is good, right, and just. And love always grows with increasing spiritual maturity and strength of character. Therefore, study the holy scriptures to learn what genuine love is, then make that your greatest virtue. Remember however, you cannot fully love God without hating and opposing evil.

## Speaking in tongues versus prophesying

- **Pursue love, and be zealous for the spiritual things, but more that ye may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, for no man hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries. 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.**
- **Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but more that ye may prophesy. For greater is he who prophesies than he who speaks in tongues, unless he translates, so that the congregation may receive edification** (First Corinthians 14:1-5).

We are to pursue love, which is the greatest of the virtues, but we are also to be zealous for the spiritual things. Those spiritual things were the gifts, services, and functions, which are manifestations of the Spirit working to promote the good news of Christ. Prophecy was one of them and speaking in tongues was another.

Paul said we should be more zealous to prophesy, because prophesying is better than speaking in tongues. Remember, prophesying is proclaiming the word of God, which now comes only from knowledge of the holy Bible.

Speaking in tongues means someone speaking a foreign language that he never learned. There were three levels of speaking in tongues:

- the ability to articulate the language
- the ability to translate the words spoken
- the ability to understand the message of the words

Not every man who was able to speak in tongues was able to translate the words. And without a translator the words would only sound like gibberish to those ignorant of the language, just as all foreign languages sound to us who have not learned them.

Regarding the third level, that of understanding the message of the words, Paul said that was not done, because the speaker **“speaks not to men, but to God, for no man hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries.”** The man who spoke in a tongue spoke mysteries of

spiritual things. Hence, no man heard him in the sense of understanding what he said. The words were unintelligible.

Those who knew the language could recognize the words, but they could not understand what the man was saying. An example would be like uttering details of quantum mechanics to most people. They could recognize the words, but would not understand any of it. Consider these words that I copied about quantum theory from the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia:

The Schrödinger equation acts on the entire probability amplitude, not merely its absolute value. Whereas the absolute value of the probability amplitude encodes information about probabilities, its phase encodes information about the interference between quantum states. This gives rise to the wave-like behavior of quantum states. It turns out that analytic solutions of Schrödinger's equation are only available for a small number of model Hamiltonians, of which the quantum harmonic oscillator, the particle in a box, the hydrogen molecular ion and the hydrogen atom are the most important representatives.

Those English words are a mystery even to most people who speak English, including myself. That is the way it was with speaking in tongues. The purpose was not to prophesy. The sole purpose of speaking in tongues was to perform a miracle to prove that God was with them. Therefore, what was said was never understood. Knowledge and understanding was the purpose of prophecy, but not the purpose of speaking in tongues.

Remember the first time people heard the miracle of speaking in tongues: **“And while fulfilling the day of Pentecost, they 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.**

**“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 2:1-11).

The people heard the apostles speaking in those many different tongues **“the great things of God.”** Nevertheless, they did not learn anything by those words. All they knew was it was a miracle from God. Therefore, it was necessary for Peter to preach to them the good news of Christ before they could learn and understand. And they listened to him because they were awed by that miracle of speaking in tongues by the apostles. That was the only purpose of speaking in tongues: to prove that God was with them, to open the hearts of the people to preaching.

Paul said the man who spoke in a tongue built himself up. What he means is that people were awed by the man's ability to utter the words of a foreign language he never learned, but they were not helped. However, he said the man who prophesies **“speaks to men edification and encouragement and comfort.”**

The man who prophesies gives people edification, encouragement, and comfort, because they understand the wisdom in what he is saying. And that wisdom is a help for them. It strengthens them, encourages them, and comforts them. Therefore, **“greater is he who prophesies than he who speaks in tongues, unless he translates.”** For he who prophesies edifies the congregation and builds it up. The man who spoke in tongues, even if he translated the words, they were not understandable, just like the quotation I gave about Quantum theory.

Paul said he wanted them all to speak in tongues. Remember, every special gift of the Holy Spirit that was given then was for the purpose of promoting the good news of Christ and proving it was from God. And the power to speak in tongues was given to persuade others to believe in Christ and his church. However, Paul also said he wanted more for them to be able to prophesy, because that builds up the congregation and edifies it.

### Tongues alone do not edify

- **But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I benefit you, unless I would speak to you either in a revelation, or in knowledge, or in proclaiming the word of God, or in doctrine? Likewise lifeless things that give a sound, whether flute or harp, if they give no distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is being piped or harped? For also if a trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?**
- **So also ye, unless ye give understandable speech by the tongue, how will that which is spoken be known? For ye will be talking into the air. Since there are perhaps, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without significance. If therefore I know not the force of the voice, I will be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me (First Corinthians 14:6-11).**

Notice how Paul said that speaking in tongues was useless unless the sounds were understood. And he gave two examples. His first example was the sounds of musical instruments. If the sounds came out indistinctly, then no music could be recognized. His second example was the signal given by a trumpet. Trumpets have been used for signaling since ancient times, although modern electronics is making them obsolete. But any signal is useless if the sound is uncertain, because signals are intended to give information.

Jehovah commanded the sons of Israel to use trumpets for various purposes. Here are the commands he gave about them: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver, of beaten work thou shall make them. And thou shall use them for the calling of the congregation, and for the journeying of the camps.**

**“And when they shall blow them, all the congregation shall gather themselves to thee at the door of the tent of meeting [the tabernacle]. And if they blow but one, then the rulers, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves to thee.**

**“And when ye blow an alarm, the camps that lie on the east side shall take their journey. And when ye blow an alarm the second time, the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey. They shall blow an alarm for their journeys.**

**“But when the assembly is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets, and they shall be to you for a statute forever throughout your generations.**

**“And when ye go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then ye shall sound an alarm with the trumpets. And ye shall be remembered before Jehovah your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.**

**“Also in the day of your gladness, and in your set feasts, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings. And they shall be to you for a memorial before your God: I am Jehovah your God” (Numbers 10:2-10).**

Paul also mentioned four different ways that understandable speech could benefit them:

- a revelation
- knowledge
- proclaiming the word of God
- doctrine

Revelation means revealing, which in this case refers to new knowledge of the word of God that had not yet been given. Divine revelations are no longer given. Knowledge refers to facts and information about spiritual things. Proclaiming the word of God is uttering the holy scriptures. And doctrine refers to specific information about the requirements of the church.

Language is the primary means used to unite people together. Indeed, that was how God divided mankind after the great flood. It was not to punish them. He did not want them to become too strong too quickly, because they were too prone to evil. People are naturally divided when they cannot understand each other’s speech, and that weakens them.

The record about that says, **“These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations. And from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood. And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.**

**“And it came to pass, as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and they had slime for mortar. And they said, Come, let us build a city for us, and a tower, and its top in the heavens. And let us make a name for us, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.**

**“And Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men built. And Jehovah said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. And now nothing will be withheld from them, which**

they propose to do. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand each other's speech.

**“So Jehovah scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore the name of it was called Babel, because Jehovah there confounded the language of all the earth, and from there Jehovah scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth”** (Genesis 10:32-11:9).

Considering all that Paul is saying in this letter to the Corinthians about speaking in tongues, they must have been very zealous for that gift. However, it may not have been a noble kind of zeal. For remember, Paul said, **“He who speaks in a tongue builds himself up ...”** (First Corinthians 14:4). They may have wanted to build themselves up more than to build up the congregation. That is no doubt one reason Paul is here diminishing the value of speaking in tongues compared with prophesying, which is proclaiming the word of God understandably.

There are many modern believers in Christ who claim that the special gift of speaking in tongues is still being given. Those who claim that gift are proud people who want to build themselves up. For they inevitably utter pure gibberish. When it is tested it always proves to be no known language but complete nonsense. It serves no purpose, except to inflate the ego of the perpetrator. The saddest thing is that it is rarely tested, and instead of developing faith in unbelievers, it drives them away in disgust.

### Pray for the ability to translate

- **So also ye, since ye are zealots of spirits, seek so that ye may excel for the edification of the church. Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may translate** (First Corinthians 14:12-13).

Paul said the brothers at Corinth were zealots of spirits. Since he was speaking about the special gifts of the Holy Spirit, he must have meant they were zealots of those gifts that were from the supernatural powers of the spiritual realm, including the ability to speak in tongues.

However, Paul emphasized the importance of excelling **“for the edification of the church.”** That was the primary purpose of those special gifts. And speaking in a tongue did not edify the church unless the words were translated, which would have been evidence for unbelievers (who knew the language) that God was with them. He wanted their zeal to be for the edification of the church, not simply to have supernatural gifts. If the words were not translated they would sound like gibberish, and that would certainly not edify the church.

### Speaking with the spirit and the intellect

- **For if I pray in a tongue my spirit prays, but my intellect is unfruitful. What is it therefore? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the intellect also. I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the intellect also** (First Corinthians 14:14-15).

This passage cannot be understood without understanding how the word spirit is being used. Fundamentally, the word spirit means energy. However, our divine spirit is not any kind of worldly energy. It is living energy begotten from the Spirit of God himself, and it comprises our eternal being.

While we live upon the earth our spirit is bound within our body of flesh and they interact together. Indeed, the Bible says our divine spirit is what gives our body life. The life or spirit of animals comes from purely earthly processes, but our life come from our divine spirit. Solomon knew about that difference, because he asked, **“Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goes downward to the earth?”** (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

Since we have that dual existence (body and spirit) Paul spoke of praying and singing with his spirit as well as praying and singing with his intellect. He was comparing the functioning of his divine spirit with the functioning of his intellect in the mind of his flesh.

Paul said when he was speaking in a tongue it was the functioning of his spirit, not the functioning of his mind of flesh. Speaking in a tongue was a supernatural process caused by the Holy Spirit in him. It was only through his mind of flesh that he could understand what he was saying. Therefore, he could not understand what he was saying, unless he could translate.

Remember however, that particular process of a man’s spirit only happened when the Holy Spirit gave a man the gift of speaking in tongues. Normally any functioning of our spirit is understood by our mind of flesh. And since the gift of speaking in tongues is no longer given, then what Paul was saying to those Corinthians does not effect us. Nevertheless, we can still find lessons in whatever he was teaching.

Paul said his intellect was unfruitful when his spirit prayed in a tongue. Therefore, he preferred to pray and sing with both his spirit and his intellect. God is supremely rational, and he wants us to be rational. It is immature and foolish to act impulsively without good reason. Therefore, Paul wanted to pray and sing rationally. I have noticed with dismay how congregational singing in many places has become more sensual and less rational.

### Be considerate of the unlearned

- **Otherwise if thou would bless with the spirit, how will the man who fills the place of the unlearned, say the Truly at thy thanksgiving, since he knows not what thou say? For thou indeed express thanks well, but the other man is not edified** (First Corinthians 14:16-17).

Paul is still talking about the gift of speaking in tongues. If the man speaking in tongues blessed with his spirit and gave thanks, the man who did not understand the language could not interact appropriately with him, and he was not edified. Paul says shortly that tongues were a sign to the unbelieving. However, they could only be a sign if the unbeliever knew the language, and he also knew that the man speaking in tongues never learned the language. That way speaking in tongues was evidence to him that God was with the man.

Paul said earlier, **“For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, for no man hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries”** (First Corinthians 14:2). Now, however, Paul speaks about thanksgiving (sometimes called a blessing) in a tongue which could be understood. Apparently most of what was said when speaking in tongues was very mysterious, and no man could hear (in the sense of understanding). However, thanksgivings could be understood by whoever knew the language. Thus, not everything spoken in a tongue was mysterious, and consequently was not heard (meaning understood).

Perhaps speaking in tongues consisted primarily of mysterious sayings that included some words of thanksgiving. The mysterious sayings were addressed to God not to men because no man could understand them. But the thanksgiving among those words of mystery were understood.

Nevertheless, it is not important for us to understand everything about the gift of speaking in tongues, because it is no longer given. Paul’s primary lesson is that whatever we say should be for the edification of the church, and to help unbelievers develop faith in Christ.

## Tongues in an assembly

- **I thank my God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Yet in an assembly I would rather speak five words with my intellect, so that I might also make others understand, than countless words in a tongue** (First Corinthians 14:18-19).

Notice how Paul told how much more in an assembly he would rather speak with his intellect than in a tongue. He was speaking of the assembling of a congregation of disciples. The disciples of Christ did not need to hear anyone speaking in tongues because they already believed. The disciples needed to hear information and knowledge. They needed to hear understandable speech so that they could understand more about the good news of Christ.

Remember, there were three levels of speaking in tongues: (1) the ability to articulate the language, (2) the ability to translate the words spoken, and (3) the ability to understand the message of the words. That last ability was not given to them (with one exception), for even with an translator they were not able to understand the message of the words. As Paul had said, **“For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, for no man hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries.”** Remember however, the exception of words of thanksgiving that Paul spoke about earlier.

Therefore, Paul diminished the value in their eyes of speaking in tongues. Its value was only to provide evidence to unbelievers (who knew the foreign language) that God was with them. Otherwise, no man could speak a language he never learned.

## Be mature in your thoughts

- **Brothers, become not children in your thoughts. Instead be childlike in wickedness, but in your thoughts become mature** (First Corinthians 14:20).

About children, 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). However, he did not mean we must be children in our thoughts. As Paul said, we must be childlike in wickedness. That means we must keep our hearts pure and innocent.

Moreover, like children, we must be eager and open minded to learn. And like children, we must also be humble and lowly in heart. Indeed, Jesus himself said, **“... I am meek and lowly in heart ...”** (Matthew 11:29).

Paul also said we must make our thoughts mature. Only fools keep their thoughts immature. They think and reason like children. Hence, they act like fools, laughing and joking when they are happy, but speaking and acting wildly when they are unhappy. They are incapable of being productive. Indeed, they enjoy being destructive. Be mature in your thoughts lest you be a fool and suffer like them. Be especially mature in your thoughts about spiritual things so that your soul can be saved.

## It was God speaking the other languages

- **In the law it is written, In other tongues and in other lips I will speak to this people, and not even so will they hear me, says the Lord** (First Corinthians 14:21).

The passage Paul quoted is from the book of Isaiah: **“No, but by *men of strange lips and with another tongue he will speak to this people, to whom he said, This is the rest. Give ye rest to him who is weary. And this is the refreshing. Yet they would not hear”*** (Isaiah 28:11-12). Notice how Paul said it was written in the law. Remember, sometimes the word law includes everything written in the Old Testament.

That passage from Isaiah is a prophecy of the special gift of the Holy Spirit to speak in other tongues. Jehovah said he would speak to his people in that miraculous way, but they still would not hear him. And that was indeed true of the great majority of the Jews. Only a remnant of them did hear him.

Remember, the power of speaking in tongues was first given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. The record about that says, **“And while fulfilling the day of Pentecost, they 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).

## Tongues are a sign for the unbelieving

- **Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelieving. But proclaiming the word of God is not to the unbelieving, but to those who believe** (First Corinthians 14:22).

The purpose of speaking in tongues was to persuade the unbelieving that the good news of Christ was from God. Tongues were a sign or supernatural evidence for them. Remember, the New Testament was not yet available. Therefore, God gave people evidence, such as the ability to speak in tongues, to verify the truth of Christ and his good news.

However, now that the New Testament is available, such special signs are not needed to persuade people. Remember, in the parable about the beggar Lazarus, how the rich man wanted Lazarus sent from heaven to warn his brothers. Here is that part of the story: **“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 words of Moses and the prophets comprised the Old Testament, which was all that was available at that time. Abraham said in effect that if a man is not persuaded by the words of the Bible, even a man raised from the dead would not be able to persuade him. The Bible is clearly sufficient for the development of faith.

When Paul said **“proclaiming the word of God is not to the unbelieving,”** he was referring to God’s commandments. And they mean nothing to the unbelieving. The word of God can refer to the entire Bible, or it can refer only to his commandments in the Bible.

Consider what Paul said in his letter to the Romans about faith and the word of God: **“So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). He said in Romans that faith is from hearing the word of God. Yet here in this book he said that proclaiming the word of God was not to the unbelieving. Speaking the commandments of God is not for the unbelieving, but the entire Bible record is. For it has the power to convert their hearts and develop faith in them. God’s commandments alone will not develop faith in the unbelieving.

## If all speak in tongues

- **If therefore the whole congregation comes together in the same place, and all men speak in tongues, and unlearned or unbelieving men come in, will they not say that ye are mad?** (First Corinthians 14:23).

The apostles were accused of being drunken when they all first spoke in tongues. For the record says, **“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. 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 2:7-13).

## If all proclaim the word of God

- **But if all proclaim the word of God, and some unbelieving or unlearned man comes in, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all. And so the secrets of his heart are made manifest. And so having fallen down on his face he will worship God, declaring that God is really among you** (First Corinthians 14:24-25).

Again remember, Paul had just said that proclaiming the word of God was not for the unbelieving. Yet now he says that proclaiming the word of God would cause an unbelieving man to fall on his face, worship God, and declare that God was really among them. Only a scoffer would declare that Paul was contradicting himself. Paul was clearly using the two different meanings of the expression “word of God.”

Consider this example: Scientists claim the earth spins on its axis as it circles the sun, and I believe them. Yet everybody speaks about things like the times of the sunrise and the sunset. If the sun is not what moves, how can it rise or set? Wise men of the world know the answers for such things in everyday speech, and spiritually wise men know the answers for such things in the word of God.

In the above passage, the word of God being spoken in the presence of the unbelieving or unlearned man was not simply stating the commands of God. The word of God includes explaining things like why we exist, why there is suffering in the world, the sources of good and evil, what God is truly like, how our flesh and our spirit struggle within our conscience, heaven and hell in the afterlife, and how we can become sons of God for eternity.

Those are the kinds of things that make manifest the secrets of men’s hearts, convicting all who loves truth and righteousness, and calling them to account. Remember this part of the story 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 8:36). That eunuch loved truth and righteousness, and he was therefore convinced by the word of God that Philip proclaimed to him

In contrast, remember this story about a Roman governor: **“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).

If Felix was a man who loved truth and righteousness, after hearing Paul teach the word of God to him, he would have humbled himself and worshiped God. But remember what the passage says next about him: **“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). Felix was not a man who loved truth and righteousness.

Regarding the secrets of a man’s heart. We all have such secrets. For no other man knows everything about us. No other man knows everything we have done. No other man knows

our thoughts. There are many secrets in the hearts of each one of us, but only God knows them all.

Indeed, he is going to judge us by the secrets of our heart as well as our behavior. For when Paul was speaking about Gentiles who have no law, he said, **“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 2:15-16).

## Do all things for edification

- **What is it therefore, brothers? When ye come together, each man of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification** (First Corinthians 14:26).

Paul listed five activities the male disciples did when they came together. Each man having,

- a psalm
- a teaching
- a tongue
- a revelation
- an interpretation

The words “each man of you has” indicate different men were to contribute to the activities during their assemblies. It does not support the priest-pastor-preacher system that has become the standard in virtually every assembly of believers. Paul commanded the involvement of every man who has something to contribute when we come together. Yet most of them must now keep silent, even those who desire to make a contribution.

Speaking in tongues and divine revelations are no longer given. They were like the law of Moses during the time of the early church. They became progressively obsolete as the New Testament was being written. However, psalms, teachings, and interpretations continue to be done in the assemblies.

A man having a psalm could mean either he would be the leader of congregational singing, or he would sing a solo. In another book Paul gave the reason for singing: **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing by grace in your hearts to God”** (Colossians 3:16).

Singing was to teach and admonish each other. And that could be done either by congregational singing and by solo singing, as well as by preaching and teaching. Solo singing would be one man using song to teach and admonish the disciples. Leading the congregation in singing would be a man’s way of teaching and admonishing collectively. Congregational singing is the only way women are ever allowed to utter anything in an assembly.

Interpretations are used to explain and clarify the word of God. And that serves a very important function in the assemblies. It is one thing to proclaim the word of God, it is another thing to interpret its meaning, which is what I try to do in my commentary.

Although Paul did not list praying with those other activities during the assemblies, in his first letter to Timothy he said, **“I desire therefore the men to pray in every place, lifting up devout hands, apart from anger and argument”** (First Timothy 2:8). Therefore, it would also be good for men to pray whenever the disciples gathered together.

Nevertheless whatever is done, Paul said that all things were to be done for edification. We have much liberty in Christ. And there are only a few commandments regarding how the members of a congregation should conduct themselves during their assembling together. Hence, there is much freedom to decide exactly what and how things are done. Nevertheless, all things must be done for edification.

Paul next gives further instructions about what should be done during the assemblies.

### Speak no tongue without translation

- **If any man speaks in a tongue, be according to two, or at the most three, and in succession. And let one translate. But if there is no translator, let him keep silence in an assembly, and let him speak to himself and to God** (First Corinthians 14:27-28).

Although the gift of speaking in tongues is no longer given, there are lessons for us in that passage. Notice how Paul said it should be done by only two or at the most three men. Moreover, they were to speak in succession. The activities during the assemblies were to be orderly.

I remember as a child attending the assembly of a Pentecostal church with a childhood friend whose father and mother were members there. I will never forget when they began to pray everyone stood and prayed aloud his own personal prayer. It was all very confusing. What I remember hearing most were the pleas of a mother close to me for the safety of her son, who was a soldier fighting during the second world war. Those people were no doubt sincere, but misled.

Paul also said that if there was no translator the man speaking in a tongue was to keep silent. Even though tongues were for unbelievers (those who understood the words of the foreign language), in an assembly of the disciples if the words of the tongue could not be translated they were not to be spoken. Otherwise, an unbeliever who might be present and did not know the language would think it was gibberish. Nobody would understand it, and the stranger would not think well of the congregation.

When Paul said the man speaking in a tongue was to speak to himself and to God, he no doubt meant he was to speak only in his thoughts. And perhaps a man with a good memory could later recite the words to some unbelievers to help them believe.

### A summary about speaking in tongues

The purpose of speaking in tongues was not to inform about the word of God, but only to provide evidence that the good news of Christ was from God. For the ability to speak a foreign language that was never learned was clearly a miracle. That purpose explains the commands Paul gave about it. As he said, **“Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelieving. But proclaiming the word of God is not to**

**the unbelieving, but to those who believe”** (First Corinthians 14:22). Tongues were a sign to the unbelieving. They were evidence that the power of God was with them.

And remember, although the words could be recognized (and translated) by those who spoke the language, the meaning of what they said was not understood. As Paul also said, **“For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God, for no man hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks to men edification and encouragement and comfort.”** (First Corinthians 14:2-3). The only exception to not understanding what the words of the tongue were saying was when the words were praising God.

## How spokesmen for God should speak

- **And let two or three men who have the word of God speak, and let the other men pass judgment. But if it should be revealed to another man who is seated, let the first be silent** (First Corinthians 14:29-30).

Paul said that proclaiming the word of God should be done by only two or three men. The other men in the assembly would then pass judgment on what was said. Paul did not want the members to simply hear the word of God without it being explained and discussed.

We need to have judgments made (in the non-critical sense) about the word of God to help us better understand, and to help us find lessons and applications from it. That is the purpose of this commentary that I am writing—to pass judgment on the words of the New Testament, to help you better understand and to see how it can be applied.

When Paul spoke of the word of God being revealed to another man who was seated, he was referring to what he earlier called revelations. That means the man would be proclaiming the word of God from divine inspiration. Remember however, no man now has that gift of the Holy Spirit or ever will have. Proclaiming the word of God from divine inspiration ended when the New Testament was written. The application of what Paul said now would be when a man wanted to contribute a thought or a lesson to the congregation.

Notice how Paul said the other man, to whom it was revealed, was seated. That suggests the men who were speaking were standing. That means whenever a man made a comment, or desired to make a comment, he would stand to be recognized. That is an excellent way to prevent the tendency to frequently interrupt to make a comment, especially when there were disagreements about judgments.

I have seen many examples of discussions in the secular world degenerating into an arena of competition instead of being a time of enlightenment. And the most aggressive men strive to dominate. That should never happen in the assemblies of the sanctified. Hence, standing to be recognized before speaking is an excellent way to maintain civility and order. The modern tradition of raising a hand to be recognized is an inferior way, because the raised hand is more easily overlooked, especially when several hands are raised.

## That all may learn and be encouraged

- **For ye can all proclaim the word of God one by one, so that all may learn, and all may be encouraged** (First Corinthians 14:31).

What Paul said in the passage was that all of the men (of the disciples) in the assembly had the right to proclaim the word of God, but they must do it one by one. They were not to be like many groups of unbelievers who speak (and often shout) all at the same time. And remember, only two or three men were to proclaim the word of God before the other men were to pass judgment on what was said.

Notice how Paul said the reason was **“so that all may learn, and all may be encouraged.”** False conclusions are often created when our perception is limited to one experience. We best learn about things by examining them in different ways. Consider this proverb: **“He who pleads his case first seems just, but his neighbor comes and searches him out”** (Proverbs 18:17).

Therefore, limiting the number of qualified men who can speak prevents many in the congregation from learning anything new. And that limitation in learning can be discouraging. For the more we learn about the good news of Christ the more it will encourage and strengthen our spirits.

## God is not a God of confusion

- **And the spirits of men who proclaim the word of God are subject to men who proclaim the word of God, for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace** (First Corinthians 14:32-33).

What Paul meant by the spirit of a man was his activities, because the word spirit means energy. And when men proclaim the word of God their activities are subject to other such men. Men who proclaim the word of God have a great responsibility to God. They must not only speak the word accurately but their behavior must be above reproach.

Therefore, the men who proclaim the word of God must maintain oversight of each other. Otherwise there would be great confusion about what the word of God really says. For a man could claim to be proclaiming the word of God, but would be speaking falsely. Hence, each man who speaks the word of God must be subject to the other men who proclaim the word of God.

For our God is a God of peace, and he wants peace among us, not confusion. Discord and confusion are major ways the devil has of weakening the church. Consider the Bible itself. There are some serious differences in what the various translations of the Bible say. But the greatest differences are in how its words are interpreted. And that has sown much discord among believers.

## Let women keep silent in the churches

- **As in all the churches of the sanctified, let the women keep silent in the churches. For it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be subordinate, as the law also says** (First Corinthians 14:34).

That is a very clear command, which was obeyed for many centuries. However, with the rise of humanism with its doctrine of egalitarianism, that command is now almost universally disobeyed. In some churches that claim to be disciples of Christ they have removed

every distinction between men and women. The women are allowed to dress like men and do everything that men do. And they are not required to be subordinate. Indeed, some of them are made speakers and leaders of the men.

Just as ancient Israel began worshiping idols, these modern churches are following the ways of the sinful world. Modern women have demanded equality, and because modern men are spiritually weak and cowardly they have given it to them.

I fellowship with Christians who have been more zealous to obey the will of God, striving to conform to the genuine good news of Christ. However, the spirit of the world has affected them as well. There is less zeal to be strict about obedience. And like the denominations, they are beginning to interpret the scriptures to conform to the ways of the world. That is especially true with the commands about women.

Their women are no longer required to have their heads covered during prayer, and they are allowed to speak as freely as the men are. The only time they are required to be silent is during the so-called Sunday worship service (which is a modern distinction not found in the Bible). However, most of the men are required to remain silent at that time as well. They have structured that service so that most of the members, both men and women, must sit silently and passively. At other times during their assemblies the women are given the right to speak as freely as the men.

They have not yet made women to be speakers and leaders in the congregations. But in the church related schools they have made women to be speakers, teachers, and leaders of men. Their women are not subordinate. The leaders there give the excuse that the schools are not churches. Therefore, they justify ignoring the commands about women's silence and subordination during their gatherings.

Paul said that command was also in the law. However, there is no direct command in the law of Moses about that restriction. Nevertheless, the Jews had many other commands in their law, not all of which were criticized by Christ. And apparently they had added that command to their law later in their history. They probably added it because of similar demands by the ancient women for equality. For Isaiah tells of a time when women ruled over them: **“As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, those who lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths”** (Isaiah 3:12).

Regarding the act of singing during the assemblies, no specific commands are given anywhere in the New Testament about women singing or not. The scriptures would have made it clear if women were forbidden to even join in congregational singing. It would have been very easy for Paul to say “It is not permitted for them to speak or to sing.” But he only said they were not permitted to speak.

### Let them question their husbands at home

- **And if they want to learn anything, let them question their own husbands at home, for it is an ugly thing for women to speak in an assembly** (First Corinthians 14:35).

Women are not even allowed to ask questions during the assemblies. They must ask their husbands in the privacy of their homes. I have heard those opposed to this command ask, What about women who have no husbands? Obviously in cases like that the woman should ask some other men (privately), especially the elders of the congregation.

Paul emphasized the importance of women's silence in the assemblies by saying it was an ugly thing for them to speak. It may not be ugly to men, but it is ugly in the sight of God. Therefore ladies, if you do not want to appear ugly in God's sight, then keep silent during the assemblies—all of our assemblies that are in the name of Christ. Of course, things like fellowship dinners would not be as restricted.

One of the things that has helped people abolish this command is the development of coeducational classes in the public schools of America. Such coeducational classes are now common in the congregations, and women in them are given equal rights with the men. Women in the coeducational schools are even made teachers of young men and are given other authority over the men, even in the church related schools. All of those things violate the principle of what Paul commanded. Yet the power of worldly influence and the desire for worldly popularity has caused them to violate this clear command of God.

### What Paul writes are God's commandments

- **Or did the word of God come forth from you? Or did it come to you only? 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. But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant** (First Corinthians 14:36-38).

Paul had given many commands in this letter to the brothers at Corinth. And he now emphasizes the fact that those were commandments of the Lord, not Paul's commandments. And he said that if any man presumed himself to be a spokesman for God or is spiritual, then he should acknowledge the fact that what Paul wrote to them were commandments of the Lord. And those commandments were not for them only. They are commandments for every disciple of Christ.

Paul asked them if the word of God came forth from them, or did it come to them only. The answer to both of those questions is, of course, no. When they spoke the word of God, it was not from them. They did not originate the words. The words came forth from the Holy Spirit of God. They only uttered them. Moreover, the word of God has come to many men, not just to those at Corinth.

Paul's main lesson to them in those words was that they had no right to change the commands of God. Nor did they have the right to select and reject among those commands. Changing God's commands and selecting and rejecting among them has been practiced throughout history. The Israelites did it and they still do it. And the believers in Christ have been doing those things almost from the beginning. Nevertheless, Paul rebuked those evil practices.

Men do those things to please themselves not to please God. They are like the Pharisees who believed in Jesus but would not confess him, because **“they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”** (John 12:43).

Paul knew that many men would ignore him about God's commandments. Such men make themselves ignorant. Ignorance is the absence of knowledge. And when a man ignores or perverts God's commandments he is keeping himself ignorant. Paul said about such men that if they choose to be ignorant that way, then let them be ignorant.

Choosing ignorance is the way of fools. For Solomon said that fools hate knowledge (see Proverbs 1:22). He also said, "... **the foolish die for lack of understanding**" (Proverbs 10:21). Beware lest you die when you keep yourself ignorant of the commandments of the Lord, especially if you deliberately reject them.

### Do all things decently and in order

- **Therefore brothers, be zealous for proclaiming the word of God, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order** (First Corinthians 14:39-40).

Although speaking in tongues was much more spectacular than proclaiming the word of God, it was not effective for edification. Speaking in tongues no longer exists, but there is still a lesson from what Paul said about them. Our zeal should be for proclaiming the word of God, not for things that impress people.

Nevertheless, whatever we do should "**be done decently and in order.**" That means order and discipline are to be carefully maintained among us. Anything or anyone that is unruly or acting improperly should be corrected. And that includes decency and orderliness in our appearance as well as our behavior.

### Paul preached the good news

- **And, brothers, I make known to you the good news that I preached to you, which also ye received, and in which ye stand, by which also ye are saved if ye hold firm that word I preached to you, unless ye believed in vain** (First Corinthians 15:1-2).

Paul earlier said to them, "... **what I write to you, that they are commandments of the Lord.**" And now Paul reminds them again that he preached the good news of Christ to them. He made it known to them and they received it. And he tells them it is by the good news of Christ that they were standing, and by which they were saved. They were standing upright in the sight of God. They were no longer spiritually fallen, because Jesus saved them from the condemnation caused by their sins.

Notice, however, that Paul qualified their salvation by saying it was dependent upon holding firm the word that he preached to them. They would have believed in vain if they did not hold firm the word that he preached to them. In other words, their faith would be useless without their continued obedience to the commands of Christ.

The Bible does not teach the very popular protestant doctrines of salvation-by-faith-only, and once-saved-always-saved. There are numerous passages that expose those doctrines as being false. And that passage is one of them.

## Those to whom Jesus appeared after he arose

- **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).

Paul continues to inform them that what he preached was the good news of Christ. He said he delivered to them what he received, which was that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and arose on the third day. The culmination of Christ's work here was his death and resurrection. That sealed his right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. It was his final sacrifice after living a sinless life in obedience to the Father.

That final sacrifice enabled him to pay our debts to God, because that was part of God's reward to him for his lifetime of perfect obedience. His sacrifice also symbolizes the necessity of sacrificing our lives (figuratively) in obedience to God if we too want to be resurrected to a new life in heaven.

Notice how Paul said Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (see Isaiah 53), and he arose on the third day according to the scriptures (see Psalm 16:10). Those things are evidence from the Old Testament prophets that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Those prophecies were given centuries before Jesus came to the earth. Only unrepentant sinners refuse to accept such solid evidence of his divinity.

Paul listed six times when Jesus appeared in his flesh after his resurrection. And he only appeared to his disciples; he did not appear to unbelievers. As Peter said when he was testifying to the man Cornelius, who became the first Gentile Christian, **“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.**

**“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 10:39-42).

Here is the list of witnesses that Paul gave:

Cephas (Simon Peter)

The twelve

Five hundred brothers at once

James

All of the apostles

Paul last of all

We know that list is not complete, because the book of Luke describes a time when Jesus appeared (initially incognito) to two men who were walking away from Jerusalem toward a village (see Luke 22:13-31). Paul's lesson seems to be that Jesus appeared to him last of all and in a different way.

I also need to explain what Paul meant by Jesus' appearing to the twelve. Paul does not say which twelve because it was common knowledge that the twelve referred to his original apostles. And even though there were only eleven of them remaining when Jesus appeared (Judas having killed himself) they were still called the twelve. That number was apparently used in a symbolic sense.

Some have argued that Matthias had been with them even though he was not selected by the other apostles to replace Judas until after Jesus had ascended into heaven (see Acts 1:26). However, Matthias is never mentioned anywhere in the New Testament except in the story about his selection by the apostles.

Which particular James that Jesus appear to is not told. I think it was probably James the brother of John. He was the first of the apostles who was killed because of his service to Christ. He was the first Christian martyr. And Jesus may have told James that would happen to him. Remember, after Jesus was resurrected he told Peter that he too would be crucified (see John 21:18-19). Peter, James, and John seemed to have been the most zealous for Christ.

When Paul said that Jesus appeared to all of the apostles, he was no doubt using the term in its general meaning of someone being sent. Hence, Paul was probably referring to all of the men that Jesus had sent out to proclaim him. Remember, after Jesus had sent out his twelve apostles, he later sent out an additional seventy men. As the book of Luke says, **"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 Paul said that Jesus appeared to him last of all. That is clear evidence that Jesus never has appeared, nor ever will appear to anyone else before the end of the world when he will appear to everyone. All such claims of having seen Jesus are based on either imagination or fraud. Believe them not.

His expression about Jesus appearing to him as to the untimely birth simply means that Jesus appeared to him unlike the others. His "birth" as an apostle was unusual, different from all the others. Some men attempt to find some special meaning in that analogy, but I think there is no value in such conjectures.

## Paul said he was the least of the apostles

- **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** (First Corinthians 15:10-11).

Paul was a very humble man. He confessed how he had formerly sinned against the church of God, judging himself the least of the apostles and not worthy to be called an apostle

because of it. Nevertheless, he accepted his apostleship, which was both a great honor and a great responsibility for him. Yet in his humility he claimed his apostleship was by the grace of God. He meant his apostleship was not something he deserved. It was by God's grace through Christ because Paul had formerly been Jesus' enemy and fought against him.

## Yet he labored more abundantly

- **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 15:10).

Although Paul said he was the least of the apostles, and was not worthy to be called an apostle, he said he labored more abundantly than them all. Paul did not let what he did in the past defeat him. Too often people become depressed and give up when they fail. Too often people brood over their guilty conscience to the detriment of their lives.

That is why modern psychotherapists try to destroy a guilty conscience. But in so doing they destroy the conscience itself. They are disciples of the devil, seeking to please men and not God. Paul kept his guilty conscience, but he did not let it make him depressed and inactive. On the contrary, he used his guilty conscience to motivate him to labor more abundantly. And in his abundant labor Paul became perhaps the most productive of them all.

Therefore, do not destroy your conscience. Heed the example of Paul and use your guilty conscience to energize you to do better. Use your guilty conscience to keep you humble and lowly, but not defeated. Strive to become more fruitful for the Lord. Imitate men like Paul, and labor more abundantly.

God forgives our sins because he is so loving and gracious to us. But do not let his grace toward you become empty. We can never deserve his grace, but we can still labor abundantly for him. We can never become worthy of his grace, but we can strive to make ourselves more worthy. We cannot undo the harm done by our past sins, but we can work more abundantly to be productive for righteousness.

However, never become puffed up about your productivity, or about anything else. Remember, it is the grace of God that is working in us. It is his Holy Spirit that he gives us. We must keep ourselves humble because that is what we deserve. We must keep ourselves humble, but not depressed and defeated. Accept defeat when it comes, but continually rise up and keep striving. Let not failure defeat you. Always keep in mind what Paul said to the Romans: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21).

Use your faith in Christ to strengthen you, because our faith is the victory that overcomes the world. As John said, **“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).

## They proclaimed and so we believed

- **Therefore whether I or those men, so we proclaim, and so ye believed** (First Corinthians 15:11).

When Paul said those men, he was referring to the other apostles. Paul was chosen last of all, and he considered himself to be the least of them. Nevertheless, he worked with them to proclaim the good news of Christ. And it was because of their work in proclaiming it, that we are able to believe. For it was through their testimony that the word of God has been recorded for us in the New Testament.

Can you imagine what the world would be like without the influence of the word of God in the New Testament? It would be a very different and a much worse place. And those of us who love truth and righteousness would all be groping in the dark about God and his will for us, especially we Gentiles.

## How can there be no resurrection?

- **Now if Christ is proclaimed that he has risen from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ risen. And if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty.**
- **And also we are found false witnesses of God, because we witnessed according to God that he raised up the Christ, whom he did not raise up, if therefore the dead are really not raised** (First Corinthians 15:12-15).

Paul now begins a lengthy discussion about the resurrection of the dead, which is a very important topic for us. For it is a vital part of our faith in the good news of Christ. The hope we have been given of eternal life with God in heaven is what makes our knowledge of Christ such good news. And we cannot have eternal life if we (our spirits) are not resurrected from the dead.

To the world the idea of being resurrected from the dead is incredible. Remember what happened when Paul gave his sermon in the middle of the Areopagus at Athens. They listened to him until he spoke of 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”** (Acts 17:32). The idea of being resurrected from the dead seems so fantastic that even some of the members of the congregation at Corinth did not believe it. Therefore, Paul explains our hope in the resurrection more fully.

He first reminds them that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not resurrected either. And if he was not resurrected then the preaching of the apostles is empty, and our faith is empty. Those things would be empty because our hope in Christ is based upon his resurrection. If he was not raised from the dead then our hope is a pure fantasy, and a very ridiculous and cruel fantasy.

Moreover, Paul said that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then the apostles would be false witnesses of God. They would be false witnesses because they were testifying that

Jesus was resurrected. However, they would be false witnesses of God only if Christ was really not raised up by God.

In that passage Paul is emphasizing the enormous harm to their faith that would result if they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. First, it would mean Christ was not risen. Second, it would mean the preaching of the apostles was empty. Third, it would mean their faith was empty. Fourth, it would mean the apostles were false witnesses of God.

## No resurrection means our faith is vain

- **For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain. Ye are still in your sins. Then also those who slept in Christ have perished.**
- **If we are men who have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men more miserable** (First Corinthians 15:16-19).

What kind of faith would those disciples have left if there was no resurrection? It would be no faith at all. What would they believe? Would they believe in men who lie? Would they believe the teachings of false witnesses? Any faith they claimed to have would be a fool's faith. That is what would happen if there was no resurrection of the dead.

Our lives would be like this description from Shakespeare: "Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" Macbeth Quote (Act V, Scene V).

Solomon said it much more succinctly: "**Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity**" (Ecclesiastes 12:8). But Solomon was wiser than Shakespeare because he did tell us of the significance of life: "**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). God will bring our eternal souls into judgment.

Paul said that if there was no resurrection our souls would still be guilty before God. We would still be in our sins. And that means we would still suffer condemnation from him. We would still be guilty if Christ was not raised, because only Christ could redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. We would be no different from the sinners of the world.

Paul expressed it very well when he said that we of all men would be more miserable. We would be more miserable because the good news of Christ commands that we sacrifice the lives of our flesh, our worldly lives for him. And what would be our reward for such an ultimate sacrifice? If there was no reward of a resurrection for us, we would be worse than fools. We would be crazy.

## Christ was raised and so will we

- **But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruit of those who are asleep. For since death is because of a man, the resurrection of the dead is also because of a man. 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** (First Corinthians 15:20-23).

No, we are not crazy. We are not of all men more miserable. On the contrary, we are the wisest (spiritually) and the most blessed of all men, because there is truly a resurrection of the dead. Christ proved it by showing himself to hundreds of men after he was raised. And if you accept the testimony of men about things of the world, why would you not accept the testimony of righteous men of God about spiritual things?

Christ was the first fruit of God's harvest of those who are worthy to become his sons for eternity. Jesus was the first fruit by proving without dispute his absolute spiritual and moral superiority. No creature on earth or in heaven can ever justifiably challenge him.

And by the willful sacrifice of his life on the cross he became the redeemer of all who belong to him. That makes us God's harvest of souls who will live with him in the new Jerusalem of heaven as his sons for eternity. And that will happen at the coming of Christ, which will be at the end of the world. All who die in Christ will be resurrected to live in the new Jerusalem with him.

The book of Revelation gives a figurative description of that final harvest: **“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.**

**“And I looked, and behold, a white cloud. And sitting upon the cloud, like a son of man, having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another agent came out from the temple, crying out in a great voice to him who sits on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle and reap, because the hour has come to reap, because the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he who sits on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped”** (Revelation 14:13-16).

Jesus was the one sitting upon the cloud and looking like a son of man. He had a crown on his head because he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. And the sickle in his hand symbolizes the harvest of souls of all who belong to him. The agent who cried out to him in a great voice, was sent by God to command Jesus to begin the harvest.

The book of Revelation then describes another gathering, the gathering of the grapes of wrath against the sinners of the world. This time the gathering was done by an agent of God, not the Son of God. The book says, **“And the agent sent his sickle to the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs”** (Revelation 14:19-20). It was not called a harvest, because the fruit was crushed and destroyed and only produced blood.

Paul also said that since death was because of a man, meaning Adam, so also the resurrection of the dead is because of a man, meaning Jesus Christ. Adam brought sin and death into the world. And because none of us live without sin that means all of us die. However, because of the sinless life of Jesus in his obedience to God we can be redeemed from the condemnation of our souls and be resurrected to live a new life, a life in heaven with God and Christ.

Now the Bible does tell of two men who did not die because were taken directly to heaven. (See Genesis 5:24 and Second Kings 2:11.) Moreover, it tells of men who are not asleep in death but who are now in heaven. (See for example Luke 16:23). However, they do not live in the new Jerusalem, because that city will not be available until after the world ends. The final harvest will be for the new Jerusalem, which will be the great temple of God and the capital city of the new world of heaven.

The men resurrected before the final harvest are probably in the paradise of heaven. Remember what Jesus said to the crucified man who defended him: **“Truly I say to thee, today thou will be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

### Afterwards the end

- **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** (First Corinthians 15:24).

At the end of the world Jesus will (1) deliver up the kingdom to the God and Father, the only true God and heavenly Father, and (2) he will abolish all rule, and all authority and power (in the world). The kingdom Paul referred to is the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ. And Jesus will deliver it up at the end of the world because until then the Father has given him all things. For he said to his apostles, **“All things, as many as the Father has are mine”** (John 16:15).

### Defeating all his enemies

- **For he must reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy abolished is death** (First Corinthians 15:25-26).

In the meantime, however, Jesus must reign until he will put all his enemies under his feet. Jesus has enemies both in heaven and on the earth, souls who do not want him to reign over them. For examples of those in heaven, see Jude 1:6.

Putting all his enemies under his feet is a figure of speech that means putting them all in complete subjection to him. Most of God’s offspring on the earth will be put in bondage in hell. Remember, Jesus said, **“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).

God has the power now to put all the enemies of Christ under his feet. However, he is patient and giving us time to repent, because he does not want any to perish. 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). And Paul said to the brothers at Rome, **“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).

Paul said that the last enemy to be abolished is death. He must be referring to death in this world, because hell is called the second death, and there will be many souls there. For it says in the book of Revelation, **“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).

And Jesus said that hell would last forever: **“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). There will never be any death in the world of heaven. We will all live eternally there with new incorruptible bodies.

## The subordination of all things

- **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** (First Corinthians 15:27).

God subordinated all things under the feet of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. For remember what Jesus said: **“All things, as many as the Father has are mine”** (John 16:15). Obviously, God the Father is the exception to all things being subordinated to his Son. It was necessary for Paul to say the obvious because otherwise scoffers would argue that Paul taught the idea that God the Father is subordinate to his Son.

The author of the book of Hebrews also spoke of the subordination of all things to the Son of God. Speaking of God and Christ, he said, **“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 2:8).

I added that passage because it says we do not yet see all things subordinated to him. All things are not yet subordinated to him because disobedience is still tolerated. Hence, many souls are not subordinate to Christ because they are in rebellion. God commanded all things to be subordinate to Christ, but many souls are his enemies and have rebelled against him. Remember however, Jesus is in the process of either defeating or converting his enemies so they too will eventually be in subjection to him.

## The Son will be made subordinate

- **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 15:28).

After the end of the world and all things are completely made subordinate to the Son, then he too will be made subordinate to God the Father. Remember, it was the Father who subordinated all things to his Son. After reading those things, how can anybody still believe in the false trinity theory, which says the Father and the Son are co-equal? With equality there cannot be subordination, because subordination means being at a lower rank.

Paul said that all things, including the Son himself, will eventually be subordinated to God the Father. And when that happens then God will be all in all. That means everything will be in harmony with God. Even those in hell will be in harmony with him, but working for him without freedom, being under the control of an iron rod. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Immersed for the dead

- **Otherwise what will they do who are immersed for the dead? If the dead do not rise at all, why then are they immersed for the dead?** (First Corinthians 15:29).

That passage can only be understood by interpreting the use of the word dead to mean those who are physically alive but spiritually dead. Here are a few passages that use the word that way:

**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 ...** (Romans 6:13).

**And he subordinated all things under his feet, and appointed him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulfillment of him who fills all in all. 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 1:22-2:2).

**And you, being dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you he made alive together with him, having forgiven us all the transgressions ...** (Colossians 2:13).

**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).

While we were **“dead in trespasses and sins”** Jesus made us **“alive together with him”** which was when we repented and were immersed in water for the remission of our sins. The rite of immersion in water is for the dead, the physically alive but spiritually dead. Hence, if **“the dead do not rise at all,”** then why bother? Why should the dead, the spiritually dead, be immersed if there is no resurrection? But the dead are indeed raised, because Christ was raised.

Being immersed for the dead means being immersed for the crucified Christ. And the dead who are immersed are the spiritually dead, being immersed to rise for a new life. As Paul said in this passage, **“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 6:4). We were buried together with Christ, and only the dead are buried, not the living. And it is for our hope of being resurrected that we submit to that burial.

## Being in constant peril

- **And we, why are we in peril every hour? By the pride that belongs to you, that I keep in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily** (First Corinthians 15:30-31).

Paul said that he and his co-workmen were in peril every hour. That means they were in constant peril. The Bible records several attempts that had been made to assassinate Paul, and he was never free from that danger. All of those who were working to promote the good news of Christ were in constant peril of some kind of assault. And since Paul was a leader in the cause of Christ, he was in mortal danger. Hence, his dying daily was obviously figurative language, meaning facing the risk of death daily.

Paul also said he died daily by the pride that belonged to them, the pride that he kept in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul’s pride was in the Lord. Regarding pride, Paul said in his second letter to them, **“But he who boasts should boast in the Lord”** (Second Corinthians 10:17). Their pride was in the Lord, and Paul was a keeper of their pride.

## Why sacrifice if the dead are not raised?

- **If in respect to men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what is the benefit to me if the dead are not raised? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die** (First Corinthians 15:32).

Paul then gave an example of the persecutions he suffered at Ephesus. It was at Ephesus that the silversmiths caused a riot in the city against him. Remember that story:

**“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.**

**“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”** (Acts 19:23-29).

The people of Ephesus, in a rage began acting like savage beasts. It was against such men that Paul struggled to promote the truth of God. They were beasts in a spiritual sense, and

he fought with them in a spiritual sense. Hence, if the dead are not raised what was the benefit to Paul for his struggles.

It the dead are not raised, then it makes more sense to simply enjoy life until we die. And as virtually everybody knows that is the primary philosophy of the world: **“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** They live to pursue pleasure. That is why destructive things like liquor and narcotics are so popular. Billions upon billions of dollars are wasted, and many lives are lost because of the destructive effects of such evil things.

Indeed, the quest for pleasure and happiness is considered one of the basic rights of every man, and was so stated by the American Declaration of Independence. The statement that contains it says, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Those are noble sounding words, but they are not in the Spirit of Christ. They are based upon the false ideology of Humanism. Promoting those so-called unalienable rights instead of the duties of those who promote the good news of Christ has led to the spiritual and moral decay of our people.

## Have no evil associations

- **Be not led astray. Evil associations corrupt good habits** (First Corinthians 15:33).

Associating with evil of any kind in any way will corrupt you. Paul warned not to be led astray. It often seems innocent and harmless to simply associate with something evil or with an evil person. However, you cannot have evil friends or associate with them without causing you to begin doing evil. You cannot expose yourself to immoral entertainment without weakening your morals. As Solomon said, **“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?”** (Proverbs 6:27). Flee from every kind of evil association.

## Sober up and sin not

- **Sober up rightly, and do not sin, for some have ignorance of God. I speak shame about you** (First Corinthians 15:34).

Being ignorant is like having a clouded mind or one impaired by drunkenness. It causes stumbling and confusion. There was no reason for those disciples to be ignorant. Therefore, Paul admonished them to come out of their ignorance and clear their minds. He expressed it by telling them to sober up. And he told them to do it rightly. The wrong way is to reject the knowledge of truth that you hear as soon as you learn of it, which is the way of fools. The right way is to accept it, and use it to avoid evil and live right.

Having ignorance of God is not just being unaware of his existence. It is not knowing what he is like, and what his will is for us. And that kind of ignorance is exceedingly widespread. Satan and his disciples have succeeded in leading the great majority of people astray from God by keeping them ignorant of him. And there were some in the congregation at Corinth that were ignorant of God that way.

Paul even said he spoke shame about them. They had no excuse for their clouded minds and ignorance of God. And that was shameful of them. That was a severe rebuke from him. And it was the second time he rebuked them that way. The first time was about legal disputes among them, when he said, **“I speak shame about you. So there is not among you not even one wise man who will be able to arbitrate between his brother?”** (First Corinthians 6:5). The record in the Bible only mentions the congregation at Corinth being rebuked by Paul that way, although Jesus rebuked from heaven some of the seven churches of Asia (see Revelation 2-3).

Paul spoke those words in the middle of his teachings about the resurrection of the dead. And that suggests he was very dismayed by their ignorance of that very basic part of the good news of Christ. Indeed, it would not even be good news if the dead were not raised to live again. Those disciples deserved being rebuked severely that way.

### To become a plant the seed must die

- **But some man will say, How are the dead raised, and with what kind of body do they come? Thou foolish man, what thou sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what thou sow, thou do not sow the body that it will become, but a bare grain, if it may happen of wheat, or of some other kind** (First Corinthians 15:35-37).

Asking that question reveals the shallowness of their understanding. Paul said a man who asked such a question was a foolish man, because it was a foolish question. That question assumed the resurrection involved simply coming back to life in this world. And if the dead were raised to live in the world, why would they not age and die again later?

From that way of thinking, it was logical to ask how the dead would be raised and with what kind of body would they have. But like so many foolish questions that people ask about God, that question was based upon the wrong kind of thinking. For the dead are raised to live in the heavenly world, not this one.

Paul then gave the excellent example of what happens to a seed when it is buried. Seed remain dormant and useless as a seed unless it dies in the earth. And when that happens the seed is transformed into a living plant, which is nothing like the seed itself. The seed changes its form into something entirely different. Moreover, what is sown is not the plant it will become, but a bare grain, whether of wheat or some other kind of vegetation.

That is also true of our body of flesh. A man's seed does not grow into a child unless it is planted in the womb of his wife. And when that happens the man's microscopic seed (combined with the woman's) gradually becomes transformed into a child.

Before the development of modern microscopes there was a popular theory that a man's seed was in the form of a miniature child, which they called a homunculus. That theory is called preformation, and it says that an individual develops by simple enlargement of a tiny fully formed organism (a homunculus) that exists in the germ cell. However, that theory is now completely discredited.

What Paul taught was the truth: that the seed looks nothing like the organism it becomes. And so it is when we are resurrected from the dead.

## God gives different bodies

- **But God gives it a body as he wills, and to each of the seeds its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but one of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fishes, and another of birds, and heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies (but the glory of the heavenly is different, and the glory of the earthly is different), another glory is of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory (First Corinthians 15:38-41).**

Paul is here simply reminding them of the obvious. Namely, that each different kind of seed results in a different kind of body. For there are a great variety of different kinds of bodies in the world: those of men, those of beasts, those of fishes, those of birds. There are also different kind of heavenly bodies and different kinds of earthly bodies.

Paul even told how each star differs in its glory from every other star. He could not have known that except by divine inspiration. For the great majority of stars that are visible to the naked eye all seem the same. Yet Paul says they are all different. And the great telescopes of modern astronomy have proven that is true.

Notice how Paul said it was God who gives each its own body. God is continually active in the world using the power of his Spirit to give each seed its own body. The idea that things grow only by the forces of nature is both false and foolish. God is the force behind them all. You can learn much more about that by reading my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Being sown then being raised

- **So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in the perishable, it is raised in imperishability. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (First Corinthians 15:42-44).**

Paul listed four ways that our bodies of flesh will differ from our heavenly bodies. He said our bodies of flesh are,

sown in the perishable, raised in imperishability  
 sown in dishonor, raised in glory  
 sown in weakness, raised in power  
 sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body

Our bodies of flesh do indeed perish and are buried in the earth like those of the beasts. Our bodies of flesh live and perish in weakness because they are of the natural world. Consequently, they will not be raised to the heavenly world. For Paul says shortly that **“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability”** (First Corinthians 15:50).

In contrast, our heavenly bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. They will be like the heavenly body of Christ our Lord. For the apostle John said, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be.**

**But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2).

John was privileged to see Jesus in his heavenly glory. And in his book of Revelation he describes how the Lord appeared to him: **“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 ...”** (Revelation 1:13-15).

The Lord’s heavenly body is imperishable; it is glorious; it is powerful; and it is spiritual. And as John said, we will be like him. What a marvelous blessing that will be. Therefore dear brother, remain faithful to the end so that you can be resurrected to eternal life.

### Natural bodies and spiritual bodies

- **There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body** (First Corinthians 15:44).

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, **“God is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth”** (John 4:24). God is a Spirit. But he is not a Spirit only, because he too has a body. As Paul said, there are natural bodies and there are spiritual bodies. Therefore, just because Jesus said God is a Spirit does not mean he has no body. For if God has no body, then how could Jesus be **“the exact image of his essence ... [and] at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights”?** (Hebrews 1:3).

God is not some kind of ethereal ghost, because he does have a body. I explain how God can have a body sitting in a throne while his Spirit can be everywhere, plus many other things about him in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### The first and the last Adam

- **And so it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam a life giving spirit** (First Corinthians 15:45).

It is written in the book of Genesis, **“And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul”** (Genesis 2:7). The last Adam was Jesus Christ. And it is from him and him alone that we can have true life, eternal life.

Adam and Jesus are similar in a unique way because they are both called the son of God. Adam is called the son of God in Luke’s biography of Jesus. For Luke’s genealogy of Jesus ends with these words: **“... the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God”** (Luke 3:38). Jesus is called the son of God in many passages.

They were both called the son of God because neither one of them had an earthly father; God was their Father. Therefore, in that sense Jesus was the last Adam, being the last man who had no earthly father. However, Adam was simply a living soul; Jesus Christ was a life giving spirit, far superior to the first Adam.

## First the natural then the spiritual

- **Nevertheless the spiritual is not first, but the natural, then the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, earthly. The second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthly, such also are the earthly. And as is the heavenly, such also are the heavenly. And just as we have worn the form of the earthly, we will also wear the form of the heavenly** (First Corinthians 15:46-49).

Paul is here contrasting the spiritual with the natural or earthly. The name Adam also means man. And as Paul spoke about the first Adam and the last Adam, he now speaks about the first man and the second man. But he is still comparing the same two souls: the man Adam and the man Jesus Christ. The first man Adam was called the son of God because he had no earthly father, and Jesus was the second man called the son of God because he also had no earthly father. However, Adam was of the earth, earthly, while Jesus is the Lord from heaven.

Adam was a Son of God from the beginning. However, we become sons of God through adoption (we are born his sons but we all lose our sonship when we sin). God adopts us to be his sons when we become disciples of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. As Paul said, **“For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many as were immersed into Christ have put on Christ”** (Galatians 3:26-27).

Paul also said, **“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 also called children of God in this world. But in heaven we will all be sons of God, because remember the female gender will no longer be needed. Both former males and former females in the flesh will be given masculine bodies that are spiritual.) Our becoming sons of God that way means we are not given our spiritual body first. We are given our natural body first. Then, if we belong to Christ, after our body of flesh dies our spirit is resurrected to be given our spiritual body.

Things that are earthly have an earthly nature. Things that are heavenly have a heavenly nature. And just as we have worn the form of the earthly in our bodies of flesh, so also we will wear the form of the heavenly with incorruptible bodies that are similar to that of Jesus our Lord. For remember, John said that **“we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2).

## Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom

- **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).

There have been some men even now who have misunderstood the nature of the resurrection, thinking that our bodies of flesh will also be resurrected. However, in that passage Paul clearly says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Our bodies of flesh all return to dust. They will never be resurrected because they are perishable. Such bodies of flesh would simply die again.

Therefore, perishable bodies cannot inherit imperishability. Our bodies of flesh return to the dust from whence they came. Our earthly bodies suffer the same fate as that of Adam when Jehovah said to him after he sinned, **“In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it thou were taken. For thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return”** (Genesis 3:19). It is our spirit that is resurrected to be given a spiritual body that is imperishable.

### We will all be transformed

- **Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed. For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality** (First Corinthians 15:51-53).

Paul here tells how some of us will be resurrected immediately after our death. That means some of us will not sleep the sleep of death. For remember, death for us is a kind of sleep. In death our bodies decay away (sooner or later), but our spirits only sleep. They sleep because our spirits are eternal and cannot be obliterated by death the way our bodies of flesh are.

Nevertheless, Paul said that whether we sleep or are taken immediately, we will all be transformed. And that transformation will be instantaneous. Paul said that transformation would be at the last trumpet. That last trumpet will be when the Lord Jesus returns at the end of the world to gather his disciples to him.

For Jesus said to them, **“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).

But what happens to those who do not sleep before the last trumpet sounds, those who are taken immediately after their bodies die? They are probably taken to the paradise that Jesus spoke about on the cross. Remember his words to the crucified man who defended him: **“Truly I say to thee, today thou wilt be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

In his second letter to the brothers at Corinth, Paul also told of the paradise: **“I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in body, I know not, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) such a man was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in body, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) that he was caught up into the paradise, and heard inexpressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter”** (Second Corinthians 12:2-4).

Paul said the man was caught up as far as the third heaven. Our atmosphere is the first heaven; the outer space of our world is the second heaven; and the greater spiritual world is the third heaven where God resides. The Bible tells us only a little about the third heaven. We know it is much more massive than our world. Indeed, the Bible suggests our world is somewhere contained in a special space inside of the third heaven, although of a different and temporary nature. For Jehovah said about it, **“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”** (Isaiah 66:1).

Paul also said the man was caught up into the paradise. Jesus also spoke of paradise when he appeared to John in his heavenly glory, saying, **“To him who overcomes, I will give him to eat from the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of my God”** (Revelation 2:7). It is there that we will apparently be given our imperishable bodies.

The Bible first speaks of the tree of life being in the garden of Eden where Adam was created. After Adam sinned he was sent out of the garden, but the Bible does not say the garden was destroyed. Instead, it says, **“And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil, and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—therefore Jehovah God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken. 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 3:22-24).

Notice how the tree of life in the garden of Eden remained but it was guarded so that no man could enter into the garden. And since Jesus said the tree of life was in the paradise of God, that suggests the paradise was the garden of Eden. That also suggests the garden of Eden is to the world as the world is to the third heaven. It may be a special space inside of the world, perhaps remaining on the earth, but of a different nature, both invisible and inaccessible to us.

(Incidentally, that idea about paradise was suggested to me from what Irwin Moon said in one of his films about the possible existence of another dimension of space in our world. He used that idea to explain how Jesus appeared and disappeared to his disciples after his resurrection. Irwin Moon was the creator of the superb series of motion picture films called Sermons from Science.)

Those things about paradise would explain what happens to those who do not sleep before the last trumpet sounds, but are taken immediately after their bodies die. They could be taken to the paradise, just as the crucified man was taken with Jesus to the paradise. And in order to be there our mortal nature must put on immortality. That means we must put off our bodies of flesh and put on the imperishable bodies of the spirit.

Also if those who do not sleep in death reside in the invisible paradise of God which is still in the world, then that would explain how we would all be gathered together in the sky to be with Jesus at the last trumpet. That would mean every spirit that belongs to Christ would be resurrected, whether they sleep in death or not.

Actually the paradise of God may be throughout the universe, but in a different dimension. It may be a kind of parallel world residing in the same space, but completely invisible and inaccessible to us as long as we are in the flesh. Of course, all of that is conjecture, but modern scientists have also conjectured about parallel worlds.

## The mortal will put on immortality

- **But when this perishable will have put on imperishability, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying that is written, Death was swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law** (First Corinthians 15:54-56).

What Paul meant by this perishable and this mortal were our lives in this world. Our lives—our divine spirits—will put on imperishability and immortality. He was not saying our flesh would, because remember, he had just said **“that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability.”** Our spirits will put on imperishable and immortal bodies, which the Lord will give to all who belong to him. The souls of unrepentant sinners will remain naked.

The scripture that Paul quoted was from this passage in the book of Isaiah: **“And in this mountain Jehovah of hosts will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the dregs, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the dregs well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the face of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations.**

**“He will swallow up death in victory, and the lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces. And he will take away the reproach of his people from off all the earth. For Jehovah has spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him, and he will save us. This is Jehovah. We have waited for him. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”** (Isaiah 25:6-9).

## God gives us the victory through Christ

- **But thanks to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ** (First Corinthians 15:57).

God gives us victory over death and all of our enemies. And he does it through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our victory is through our faith in him. For the apostle John said that our faith was the victory that overcomes 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 in our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the victory because he has redeemed from condemnation all who belong to him. Our eternal spirits will never die. As Jesus said to Martha when he came to them after Lazarus had died, **“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?”** (John 11:25-26).

Dear reader, if you believe it, and commit your life to him and his righteousness, remaining faithful to the end, then you will **“no, not die, into the age.”** Our flesh will indeed die, but our spirits will live forever in heaven with new imperishable bodies as sons of God for eternity.

## Be always abounding in his work

- **Therefore, my beloved brothers, become ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not empty in the Lord** (First Corinthians 15:58).

Paul said he wanted his beloved brothers at Corinth to become

steadfast  
 unmovable  
 always abounding in the work of the Lord

Being steadfast in righteousness is a great virtue. It means to be reliable and to persevere. We certainly want the machines we use to be steadfast. Think of how frustrating and disappointing we are in them when they are not steadfast. Remember that when you are tempted to not be steadfast. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by not being steadfast.

Being unmovable means not deviating from the right ways of God. It means remaining in the restricted way that Jesus said leads to life: **“How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Matthew 7:14). Our great enemy the devil tries to move us away from the ways of God. And he uses many temptations to allure us. But heed this advice of James: **“... resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7).

Abounding in the work of the Lord means to bear much fruit for righteousness in whatever ways we have opportunities. Saving souls by bringing them to Christ is a great way to abound in the Lord. However, every act of righteousness is part of the work of the Lord.

For God said to mankind after he created 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 1:28). Our duty is to continue developing the creation that God began. Hence, any endeavor to multiply and improve the world is part of abounding in the work of the Lord. And the greatest part of that is to multiply souls for Christ, and improve the world by promoting God’s truth and righteousness.

Paul said we should know, that when we are steadfast, unmovable, and abounding in the work of the Lord, then our labor is not empty in the Lord. For God works with us. And even though sometimes our labors in the Lord seem empty, God will eventually cause them to be fruitful. Many of God’s great prophets thought they were failing because they could not see any tangible results of their labors. But they remained steadfast and unmovable, and their labors always proved to be abounding with fruitfulness in the long run.

## Collections for the sanctified

- **Now concerning the collection for the sanctified, as I arranged for the congregations of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each of you set something aside near himself, storing up whatever he may prosper, so that when I come no collections may be made then.**

- **And when I arrive, whomever ye may approve by letters, I will send these men to bring your gift to Jerusalem. And if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me** (First Corinthians 16:1-4).

Paul now gives instructions about a special collection for the sanctified in Jerusalem. He said they were the same instructions he had given to the congregations of Galatia. However, there is no surviving record of such instructions, because no mention of a collection is made in the one letter he wrote to the Galatians that we have in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the above information tells us this was not a collection made only from the brothers in Corinth. It was a broad collection from other Gentile congregations.

Paul's instructions include four things:

- each of them was to set aside something near himself
- he was to store up what he set aside
- what was set aside was to be from whatever he might prosper
- it was to be done on the first day of the week

Although Paul said it was to be done upon the first day of the week, it seems obvious he did not mean it was to be done on only one first day of the week. He no doubt meant that when they did set aside to store up whatever they prospered it was to be done weekly, on the first day of each week.

Paul said the reason for those instructions was that no collections would be made when he arrived. Notice how he said no collections in the plural. He clearly did not want to wait for many collections to be made after he arrived. He wanted only one collection from what each disciple had already set aside to accumulate near himself. That would mean the congregation would have no need for a church treasurer. That would also avoid the need for the congregation to store a growing sum and guard it until Paul arrived.

Those instructions would also have established a routine for the disciples to help insure regular contributions from what they had prospered. Each man would have his own private savings account to accumulate his contributions. And such funds could later be used for special purposes that would arise, like the one for the disciples in Jerusalem.

Paul also did not specify how much they were to set aside. The Law of Moses required the Israelites to tithe, which meant ten percent of whatever they prospered. There were actually several kinds of tithes mentioned in the law which were to be made at different times for different purposes. (You can learn more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.) However, we the disciples of Christ are not required to tithe. We are simply to contribute as we prosper. For we are under the law of liberty, and have freedom about many such things.

Regarding the traditional Sunday contribution, I do not believe the instructions Paul gave here forbid any kind of regular collection. Remember, his instructions were about a special collection for a specific purpose; namely, for the sanctified at Jerusalem. And the work of the church requires support from contributions for many purposes. And since we are under the law of liberty, then we are free to make such regular collections.

Notice how Paul specified how their gift was to be taken to Jerusalem. It was to be taken by several men. That would have virtually prevented any kind of fraud or suspicion of fraud with the funds. Paul also wanted their approval of the men to be by letters. Although

Paul's purpose of such letters was not stated, written records about group activities are always good to have, especially regarding money.

Paul also said he would send the men with their gift to Jerusalem after he arrived at Corinth. Their letters of approval could have been used to introduce the men to the sanctified at Jerusalem. It is much better when unfamiliar men are introduced with letters of recommendation. It provides important protections against the unscrupulous.

In his second letter to them Paul said about such unscrupulous men: **“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).

Nevertheless, Paul did express his willingness to take the gift to the disciples at Jerusalem. However, he would take the men they approved with him. He would not take such a gift alone; taking it alone would have greatly increased the risk of being attacked by bandits. Moreover, it would also have given occasion for all kinds of slander about him. Therefore, it is always wise to seek to prevent occasions for slander against what you do. The devil and his disciples are always seeking occasions to slander us.

I regret to say that I have not always taken such precautions. There were times when I have allowed my innocence to make me naïve about such dangers. However, that is no excuse. Therefore, always be prudent and recognize what evils could result from slander against you. And let no man encourage you or try to embarrass you to let your guard down. Gently explain the wisdom of prudence.

### Paul hoped to spend time with them

- **But I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia, for I do pass through Macedonia. And it may be that I will remain with you, or I will even spend winter, so that ye may set me on my way wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now in passing, but I hope to remain some time with you, if the Lord allows. But I will remain at Ephesus until Pentecost** (First Corinthians 16:5-8).

Paul was apparently at Ephesus when this letter was written. He said he would remain there until Pentecost. He probably meant he would remain there until he needed to journey to Jerusalem in time to be at the feast of Pentecost. Remember, Ephesus was about two hundred and fifty miles due east of Corinth across the Aegean Sea.

Paul clearly wanted to spend time with the brothers at Corinth, but unforeseen circumstances could always intervene. He was planning to pass through Macedonia. Remember, Macedonia was just north of Corinth. And it would have been on the way to Corinth when traveling by land.

Paul said he might remain with them, or he might even spend the winter. That would have allowed them to set him on his way wherever he went. In other words, they could have given him a more beneficial send-off, which they could not have done if he had only seen them in passing. That was just another reason he wanted to remain some time with them.

Notice how Paul expressed his desire with the addition of the words, “... **if the Lord allows.**” We should always credit God with allowing us whenever we are given what we desire. James admonished us about that when he said, “**Go now, men who say, Today and tomorrow we will go into this city, and will operate one year there, and will engage in trade and will get gain—men who know not of the morrow. For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away—in place of your saying, If the Lord should will, then we will live and do this or that**” (James 4:13-15).

## A great and effective door at Ephesus

- **For a great and effective door has opened to me, and yet there are many who are hostile** (First Corinthians 16:9).

There were apparently many receptive souls in Ephesus, which Paul expressed figuratively with the words “**a great and effective door.**” People there had open the doors of their hearts to receive the good news of Christ. Remember however, that was where the silversmiths created a riot in the city against Paul. Also remember how he said he “**fought with beasts at Ephesus.**” Hence, there were many who were hostile to him, even though a great and effective door had been opened to him.

That is another good lesson for us. When the hearts of the people are closed, then we need to heed these words of Jesus: “**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).

However, when the hearts of the people are open, then we should persevere even when there are many others who are hostile. Let not the enemies of Christ drive us away from the fields that are ripe for harvest.

## The coming of Timothy

- **But if Timothy comes, see that he becomes without fear with you, for he works the work of the Lord, as I also. Let not any man therefore disparage him, but send him forth in peace, so that he may come to me, for I expect him with the brothers** (First Corinthians 16:10-11).

Paul did not want Timothy to have any fear with them. Nor did he want any man to disparage him. Paul probably needed to command those thing to the Corinthians because Timothy was a younger man with many physical weaknesses. Paul referred to those weaknesses of flesh in his first letter to Timothy, when he said, “**No longer drink water, but use a little wine because of thy stomach and thy frequent weaknesses**” (First Timothy 5:23).

In contrast to the weaknesses of his flesh, Timothy had a very steadfast and unmovable spirit. Indeed, Timothy was one of the most faithful of the men who worked with Paul and helped him. Consequently, Paul mentioned to the Corinthians that Timothy worked the work of the Lord, just as he did. Therefore, they should send him forth in peace so that he could come to Paul.

What Paul meant by expecting him with the brothers is not clear. Paul may have been expecting Timothy to come and be with the other brothers that were with Paul. Or perhaps he was expecting Timothy to come together with some other brothers.

Nevertheless, it is not important for us to know such details. It is only important to know how much Paul loved Timothy, and he wanted the Corinth brothers to also love him. Remember these words of the Lord: **“By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other”** (John 13:35).

## About Apollos the brother

- **And about Apollos the brother, I urged him much that he would come to you with the brothers, and it was not at all his will that he should come now, but he will come when he has opportunity** (First Corinthians 16:12).

Apollos is first mentioned in the Bible as being a Jew, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures: **“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by origin, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, being mighty in the scriptures”** (Acts 18:24).

Apollos as a Christian had apparently gained a strong reputation among the Gentiles. For remember what Paul said when he rebuked the Corinthians who were focusing on personalities instead of Christ: **“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?”** (First Corinthians 1:12-13).

Paul had urged Apollos to go to them **“with the brothers.”** Those brothers were probably men Paul sent with this letter for them. Beginning with Jesus and his apostles, whenever men went out to evangelize or do some other work of the Lord they rarely went alone. One exception to that practice was when the Holy Spirit sent Philip out to a road in a desolate area to the Ethiopian eunuch who was returning from worshipping at Jerusalem (see Acts 8:26-27).

Why Apollos did not want to come then is not told. Paul did say that Apollos would come to them when he had the opportunity. That suggest Apollos did not believe it was an opportune time for him to come. It may have been because of their divisions that involved Apollos. Since this letter containing Paul’s rebuke about those divisions was being taken by the brothers, Apollos may have thought it not wise to be there, and therefore he delayed his coming. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, it was not important for them to know. Otherwise, Paul would have told them.

## Be strong

- **Watch ye, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong** (First Corinthians 16:13).

We are to watch because we live in a world filled with evils of all kinds, both physical and spiritual. Therefore, we must continually be on guard to protect our faith. Jesus often told his disciples to watch. For example, when he was describing the end of the world, he said to them, **“Watch therefore, for ye know not when the lord of the house comes, at eve-**

ning, 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 13:35-37).

Paul told them earlier to be steadfast and unmovable. He now tells them to stand firm in the faith. Standing firm in the faith, being steadfast, and unmovable, are very important for us. God does not want spiritual weaklings. As the Lord said, **"But the righteous man will live from faith, and if he should withdraw, my soul is not pleased with him"** (Hebrews 10:38).

Paul also told them to act like men. It is horrible when men act like beasts. Yet that is becoming more common. Atheism with its allied theory of evolution has encouraged that vicious trend, because they teach that we are beasts. And when men are convinced they are beasts they begin acting like them.

We must also be strong, strong in spirit and strong in our faith. Throughout the Bible God has encouraged us to be strong in spirit. For example, the Bible says about John the immerser, **"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). And it says about Jesus, **"And the child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And the grace of God was upon him"** (Luke 2:40).

## Do all things in love

- **Let all things of you be done in love** (First Corinthians 16:14).

A whole book could be written about that command. Remember, love is the foundation of everything that is good and right and just. Paul said that loving our neighbors was the fulfillment of the whole law: **"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"** (Galatians 5:14). John even said that God himself is love (see First John 4:7).

We are commanded to do all things in love. Our motive for whatever we do should be one of love. Even causing suffering and destruction can be an act of love, if it is done to promote God's truth and righteousness. For example, the author of Hebrews said about the pain of chastening: **"For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives"** (Hebrews 12:6). And Solomon said, **"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him"** (Proverbs 22:15). Moreover, every physician knows that the causes of disease must be destroyed to save lives. And so it is with sin and wickedness.

Peter also said, **"And above all having fervent love for yourselves, because love will cover a multitude of sins, stranger-loving toward each other without complaints"** (First Peter 4:8). We can make many foolish mistakes, but both God and men will be patient with us if our motive is always from love.

## Be subject to such men

- **Now I beseech you, brothers (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruit of Achaia, and that they committed themselves to service for the**

**sanctified), that ye also be subject to such men, and to every man working together and laboring.**

- **And I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these men filled your lack. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge ye such men** (First Corinthians 16:15-18).

Stephanas is only mentioned in this letter to the Corinthians. Paul first spoke of him when he said he immersed the household of Stephanas (see First Corinthians 1:16). Remember, Achaia is the province that contained both Athens and Corinth.

Paul besought the brothers at Corinth to be subject to such men as Stephanas, and **“to every man working together and laboring.”** Paul obviously meant working together and laboring for the good news of Christ. Such men were better able to lead them, because working and laboring required them to be well educated in the will of God. Remember, the New Testament was not yet available.

Regarding Fortunatus and Achaicus, this is the only passage in the bible that mentions them. Therefore, we know nothing about them except for what Paul says here. Paul said he rejoiced at their coming, because Fortunatus and Achaicus (1) they filled their lack, and (2) they refreshed Paul’s spirit and theirs.

What Paul meant by their lack was probably what they lacked in their knowledge and understanding of the good news of Christ, although it could have included other things as well. Paul was not specific about how they refreshed his spirit and that of the Corinthian brothers. But it may have been because of their coming.

We help each other when we refresh each other’s spirits. It is another way we show our love for each other. And it is very important to show our love for each other, because Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5). That may be one reason Paul commanded the Corinthian brothers to acknowledge such men. Simply refreshing our spirit deserves our appreciation.

## Saluting each other

- **The congregations of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the congregation associated with their house. All the brothers salute you. Salute each other by a holy kiss** (First Corinthians 16:19-20).

When Paul said the congregations of Asia saluted them, that included all of the members, men and women alike. When he said the brothers saluted them, he was referring to the men only.

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.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned in the book of Acts, as well as two other books that Paul wrote besides this one: Romans and Second Timothy. They are mentioned six times in the New Testament, and each time they are mentioned together, never alone.

Notice how Paul said the congregation was associated with their house. Paul first met them in Corinth. However, they later went with him when he departed for Syria. But when they arrived at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla remained there. Hence, the congregation associated with their house must have been the one at Ephesus.

Very little is said in the New Testament about where the members of the different congregations assembled. Paul mentions here a congregation that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, which is no doubt what he meant by the congregation being associated with their house. Remember however, the book of Acts also describes an assembly that met on the third floor of a building (see Acts 20:7-10).

Meetings in houses, such as the one associated with the house of Aquila and Priscilla, are sometimes best. However, houses are not always available or convenient. Therefore, specially constructed church buildings are more commonly used. That source of a meeting place is patterned after the Jewish synagogue.

The law of Moses says nothing about synagogues. The Israelites were to worship God in the place God would choose. That place was Jerusalem where they build a temple. Men have worshiped God with animal sacrifices from the beginning. And the law commanded a continuation of that. However, after Jerusalem and the temple were first destroyed several hundred years before Christ, the Jews began meeting in synagogues. The word synagogue is like the word church, which means an assembly, gathering, or congregation. However, it came to mean the buildings they constructed for that purpose.

Even though the law of Moses said nothing about synagogues, Jesus used them to teach people. Therefore, although the New Testament says nothing about church buildings, there is no doubt they are acceptable with God.

## The salutation of Paul

- **The salutation of Paul by my hand** (First Corinthians 16:21).

That passage says Paul wrote the salutation in this last part of the letter by his own hand. That means all of the other parts of this letter were written by another man, which is more evidence that Paul was suffering from poor vision. Sosthenes may have been the man who transcribed Paul's words for this letter. Remember, Sosthenes was included in Paul's salutation at the beginning of the letter.

## A curse to all not loving the Lord Jesus

- **If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. Maranatha** (First Corinthians 16:22).

That was not the only time Paul ever uttered a curse. For he said in his letter to the Galatians, **“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).

Remember, Paul was a prophet writing from divine inspiration. And the curses he uttered were curses inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus uttered many curses against men when he was in the world. He cursed the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida (see Matthew 11:21). He cursed the scholars and the Pharisees (see Matthew 23:13-29). He cursed the man who would betray him (see Matthew 26:24). He even cursed the world because of the stumbling blocks they use against the righteous (see Matthew 18:7).

Jehovah uttered the first curse, and it was against Adam after he sinned. Indeed, every man becomes cursed by God when he sins. When Paul spoke the curse about whoever does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, he was not saying that is the only way to be cursed. He was simply reinforcing how extremely important it is for all of us to love the Lord. He was reminding us how accursed we would be if we did not love him.

However, men who are accused because they did not love the Lord can be freed from that curse by believing in Jesus Christ and repenting of their sins. For the apostle John said, **“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 3:18).

Remember however, genuine faith in Christ is more than simple belief; it always includes love for him. The demons believe in Jesus, but they hate him. Remember what one of them said to him: **“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). Therefore, every man who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ is accursed.

Maranatha is an Aramaic word that is not well understood. Some say it is a call for the Lord to come. Other say it is a greeting and a word of encouragement. It contrasts with the Greek word anathema that Paul used in his curse, which means condemned to death.

## Grace and love is with you in Christ

- **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with you. My love is with all of you in Christ Jesus. Truly** (First Corinthians 16:23-24).

Although this letter contains many words of rebuke to the brothers at Corinth, Paul still encouraged them by saying the grace of the Lord was with them, and his love was with all of them in Christ. It would only be if they resisted his admonitions and refused to repent that they would lose the grace of the Lord and Paul’s special love for them. But that did not happen, because his second letter to them tells how zealous they were to obey all that he commanded them.

# A Commentary on The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

## Salutation

- **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the congregation of God that is at Corinth, with all the sanctified who are in the whole of Achaia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ** (Second Corinthians 1:1-2).

In the salutation of his first letter to the Corinthians Paul included Sosthenes the brother. However, in the salutation of this letter he included Timothy the brother. Remember, Sosthenes may have been the man who transcribed Paul's words for his first letter. And Timothy may have been the man who transcribed them for this second letter. Timothy is mentioned often in the New Testament as a loyal helper of Paul. However, he may not have been available when Paul wrote his first letter to the disciples at Corinth.

As Paul had done in the salutation of his first letter, he told them he was an **“apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.”** That may have been one way Paul reminded them of his authority in Christ. The apostles of Christ were a unique group for that time period only. They were the spokesmen of Christ during the time when his church was established and while the New Testament was being written. They alone had the authority to speak for Christ.

Paul addressed this letter both to the congregation of God that is at Corinth and to all the sanctified who were in the whole of Achaia, which was the province containing Corinth. That suggests Paul wanted the letter read to all the disciples in that region, although he did not command it directly.

The words **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ,”** are the same ones Paul wrote at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians. In fact, those words are in the salutation of ten of the thirteen books he wrote in the New Testament. They are also in the salutation of several other books of the New Testament.

## Our encouragement

- **Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our affliction, in order for us to be able to encourage those in every affliction, through the encouragement of which we ourselves are encouraged by God** (Second Corinthians 1:3-4).

After his salutation Paul praised the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is worthy of our praise for countless reasons. Paul mentioned that God was (1) the Father of mercies, and (2) God of all encouragement.

Mercy is an act of showing kindness and compassion toward someone else. It is actually an expression of love. As Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians, **“But God, being rich in mercy, through his great love that he loved us, even us being dead in the transgressions, he made alive together with the Christ (ye are saved by grace), and raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly things in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Remember, the Bible says that God is a God of justice. And justice demands that every guilty soul be condemned because of his transgressions. However, because God is rich in mercy, through his great love that he loved us, he made us alive together with Christ, saving us from our condemnation. In his mercy God saved us by his grace.

The judgment of justice about us was that we be condemned with the devil and the demons because of our sins. However, God’s mercy triumphed over that judgment. As James said, **“Mercy triumphs over judgment”** (James 2:13). God’s mercy triumphed over that judgment through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and him only because he earned the right to redeem us from condemnation. And he earned it through justice because he deserved it, having been completely obedient to God even to the point of death on the cross.

Remember however, James also said, **“For the judgment is without mercy to him who did no mercy”** (James 2:13). No man will ever be given mercy from God who does not himself do mercy. Of course, men differ in the kind and amount of mercy they should be given. Therefore, our mercy should be shown with wisdom and discretion.

Paul also said that God was a God of all encouragement. The word “encourage” (with its variants) occurs forty-one times in the New Testament. Ten of them occur here in this first part of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Many versions translate the Greek word to say comfort, which is also part of its meaning. However, I preferred the word encourage because encouragement is always comforting, while comfort is not always encouraging. Moreover, encouragement helps give confidence for action, while comfort is simply for feeling better.

God encourages us in all our affliction so that we will then be able to encourage others in their affliction, whatever kind it may be. By experiencing ourselves the encouragement from God, we are better able to encourage others in their affliction. No man is better able to encourage those who are in affliction than someone who has himself been encouraged in his affliction.

That is one reason the Son of God came into this world to live with us. Consider what the record says about the beginning of his sufferings during the time of his trial and crucifixion. While he was praying in the garden just before his betrayal, the Bible says, **“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).

Also the author of the book of Hebrews says about him, **“Therefore he was obligated to be made like his brothers in accordance with all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God, in order to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered, having been tempted, he is able to help those being tempted”** (Hebrews 2:17-18), and, **“Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of**

**God, let us take hold of the affirmation. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin”** (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Paul also said that God encourages us in all our affliction, **“in order for us to be able to encourage those in every affliction.”** We are able to encourage those in every affliction **“through the encouragement of which we ourselves are encouraged by God.”**

That means when God encourages us in our every affliction, then we are able to encourage others in their every affliction. And as we grow older with more experiences in our lives the truth of those words becomes more apparent. For nobody can encourage us more than someone who has suffered the same way we have. Therefore, we should use that ability to encourage those of us who are suffering. And you can be sure they will certainly appreciate it.

## Abounding through Christ

- **Because, as the sufferings of the Christ abound to us, so also our encouragement abounds through the Christ** (Second Corinthians 1:5).

As we too experience many sufferings while striving to live right toward God, so also we have many encouragements through Christ. Indeed, the Bible record is filled with words of encouragement for every soul who suffers because of living righteously.

God has many ways to encourage us through his Son Jesus Christ. For 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. In him was life, and the life was the light of men”** (John 1:3-4). Christ is the creator of all things, and remember what Paul said about all things: **“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).

Through Christ all things, including our encouragement, work together for our good. And the best encouragement is from God’s holy word, the Bible. Consider just one example from the book of Hebrews, which tells us about many souls who suffered in the past because of their faith in God.

Here is the last part of that listing: **“They were stoned, they were sawed apart, they were tempted, they died in murder by sword. They wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, restricted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And all these, having been well reported through faith, did not receive the promise, God having foreseen something superior concerning us, so that without us they would not be made fully perfect”** (Hebrews 11:37-40).

The book then gives these words of encouragement to us: **“Therefore we also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, having put off every weight and cleverly entangling sin, let us run by perseverance the contest being set before us. Looking to Jesus the Pathfinder and perfecter of the faith, who, against the joy set before him, endured a cross, having despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider the man who endured such hostility against him by**

sinner, so that ye may not be weary in your souls, being disheartened. Ye have not yet resisted as far as blood, struggling against sin" (Hebrews 12:1-4).

## Your encouragement

- **But whether we are oppressed, it is for your encouragement and salvation, which works by endurance from the same sufferings that we also experience (and our hope for you is steadfast), or we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement and salvation, knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement (Second Corinthians 1:6-7).**

Paul said in that passage, that whether they (he and his co-workmen) were oppressed, or whether they were encouraged, it was for our encouragement and salvation. Their example of enduring oppression is very encouraging to us. It shows we are not alone in our oppressions. It shows how God remains with us in all our oppressions.

One of the most agonizing parts of Job's suffering was that he thought God had forsaken him. One of the things he said to God was, **"Why do thou hide thy face, and reckon me for thine enemy?"** (Job 13:24). Therefore, our awareness of the oppressions of Paul and his co-workmen is more evidence to us that God is always with us even in our oppressions.

Paul also said that oppression works by endurance. It works by endurance because oppression strengthens endurance. Paul also said to the Romans, **"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.**

**"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 5:1-5).

Our endurance works for our encouragement and salvation. It works for our encouragement and salvation because James said, **"Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him"** (James 1:12).

If we love the Lord and endure temptations and oppressions, remaining faithful to him until the end, then we will receive the crown of life. We are guaranteed to receive it because the Lord promised it. Therefore, be not disheartened by oppression. It works by endurance, and our endurance is for our salvation.

When Paul spoke of the same sufferings that he and his co-workmen experienced, he meant suffering for the cause of Christ and his good news. We cannot experience the same sufferings that Paul and his co-workmen suffered when they were oppressed, because the world has changed too much. But we do experience the same kind of sufferings, because the world will always hate us.

The world always hates us because it always hates God. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles, **"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).**

Paul said that when they were encouraged it was for our encouragement and salvation. Whether they were oppressed or encouraged it was for our encouragement and salvation. It is easier to see how their encouragement was for our encouragement, because encouragement tends to be contagious. When we see those we love being encouraged, that encourages us and strengthens our resolve.

Their encouragement was also for our salvation because their encouragement helps strengthen our faith. Having seen how God encouraged them increases our faith and trust in God. And it is through our faith in God and his Son Jesus Christ that we receive our salvation.

Paul said that as we are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement. Notice how he added the words “knowing that.” He was completely confident about that happening. It was not something he believed; it was something he knew.

The difference between faith and facts is the amount of supporting evidence. And Paul had received so many revelations from Christ that the things he believed had become facts to him. Therefore, Paul could say he *knew* that as we were partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement. Dear brother who partakes of the sufferings for Christ and his righteousness, trust God and wait for the encouragement, because it will happen.

## Extraordinarily weighed down

- **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 (Second Corinthians 1:8).**

What particular event or events that caused Paul and his co-workmen to experience such afflictions in Asia is not known. Consequently there are many conjectures. I personally believe he was referring to something that happened to them that is not recorded in the Bible. Just as most of what Jesus did was not recorded in history (see John 21:25), so most of what Paul did was no doubt not recorded.

Knowing the details of what caused their affliction in Asia is not important for us. Indeed, that information may very well have been omitted so that we can more easily apply what he said about it to whatever kind of severe afflictions we may experience.

Paul said it was such a severe affliction that they were extraordinarily weighed down, above strength, so as for them to despair even to be alive. That affliction was an extraordinary burden, weighing them down above their strength. It was so great they could not bear it. It crushed them. It was so severe that they even gave up hope of surviving. It was the worse kind of affliction in its effects.

## God rescues us from affliction

- **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 1:9-10).

Paul said that severe affliction caused the sentence of death in him and his co-workmen. That probably means they were going to die because of it. Indeed, there is some evidence that Paul had actually been crucified, but was rescued and survived. For he said to the brothers at Galatia: **“Finally, let no man cause troubles for me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus”** (Galatians 6:17). But whatever it was, God rescued them out of that **“so great a death.”** God allowed them to experience that severe affliction so that they should not be trusting in themselves, **“but in God who raises the dead.”**

And that is a lesson we should never forget. Be not overcome by any affliction, regardless of how severe it may be. Always trust in God who raises the dead. For when we trust him faithfully he will rescue us from every affliction and raise us from the dead. Heed the example of Paul and his co-workmen, and keep your hope that God will always rescue those who belong to him, whether it be their body or their soul.

God allowed Paul and his co-workmen to suffer afflictions of the most severe kind. And our knowledge of their afflictions is a great source of encouragement to us. It is an encouragement because we also know how God rescued them. He not only rescued them from severe afflictions, but he gave them the salvation of eternal life as sons of God for eternity in heaven.

And remember these encouraging words of James, **“Take an example, my brothers, of evil-suffering and longsuffering, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we regard those who endured, blessed. Ye have heard of the fortitude of Job, and have seen the outcome of the Lord, that he is very compassionate and merciful”** (James 5:10-11).

Afflictions can crush our bodies, but they cannot crush our spirits. Not as long as we keep our faith and trust in God who will rescue from every affliction. And he will raise us up from the dead so that we will never suffer again.

## Helping together

- **And of you who help together by supplication for us (a gift for us from many persons, because of many), so that there may be gratitude about you** (Second Corinthians 1:11).

Paul had told how God rescued them out of so great a death. And now he tells how the Corinthians helped together by their supplication for Paul and his co-workmen. Their supplication obviously referred to their prayers to God.

James told about God answering or not answering supplications, when he said, **“Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:2-3).

The Corinthians apparently asked God to protect and care for Paul and his co-workmen. And because of the joint efforts of the Corinthians asking the Lord rightly, that helped bring deliverance to them. Paul also said the supplication of many Corinthians for him and his co-workmen was a gift for them which helped. And it was a gift from many of them. Being a gift “because of many” probably refers to his many co-workmen who were helped.

Specifically how the supplication of the many persons helped Paul and his co-workmen is unknown, but there is no need for us to know. God could have blessed them in many other ways besides rescuing them from so great a death. The lesson is that our supplications are helpful, especially when they are from many persons. Remember, however, what James said: **“Ye do not have, because ye do not ask.”** Therefore, if we ask God rightfully, then our supplications will truly be helpful, because he does answer our prayers.

And since Paul and his co-workmen knew about their supplication for them, that brought gratitude about the Corinthians. And gratitude strengthens love and unity among people. And that too brings encouragement.

## The sincerity and purity of God

- **For our pride is this (the testimony from our conscience), that we behave in the world in the sincerity and purity of God, not by fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, and especially toward you** (Second Corinthians 1:12).

Paul spoke of their pride in behaving in the world in the sincerity and purity of God. Sincerity means being honest and trustworthy. Purity means being clean and uncontaminated, innocent and uncorrupted. And those are all qualities of God. For he is sincere and pure in everything he does.

Sincerity and purity are rare in the world. Remember, the devil is the ruler of this world. Jesus spoke of him when he said, **“Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31). The devil was cast out of heaven at the culmination of Jesus’ sinless life in the world. Jesus also spoke of the devil, when he said to the Jews, **“... he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44).

Those things explain why sincerity and purity are so rare in the world. They are rare because the vast majority of the people follow the ways of the devil. And there is no sincerity or purity in him and his ways. The great lack of sincerity and purity in the world is why most people go from the naivety and innocence of their childhood to become more suspicious, cynical, and corrupted as they age. They develop fleshly wisdom by which to live, a world-soul wisdom of cunning and craftiness. James spoke of that kind, when he said, **“This wisdom is not descending from above, but is earthly, world-soul, demonic”** (James 3:15).

Paul and his co-workmen were, therefore, proud of their behavior in the world, because it was in the sincerity and purity of God, not in cunning and craftiness. They were walking in the ways of God in contrast to the ways of the world. They reached the balance of true wisdom, not the fleshly world-soul wisdom. They recognized the evils of the world, but were careful to avoid being contaminated and corrupted by them. They applied this advice that Jesus gave to his twelve 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).

Moreover, they did not let the evils of the world defeat them. They heeded this advice that Paul gave to the Romans: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21). That is the way of God: being sincere and pure, yet overcoming evil with good.

Paul and his co-workmen behaved in the world in the sincerity and purity of God, not by fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God. It is by the grace of God, by his marvelous goodness and kindness to us, that we are able to behave in his sincerity and purity. By his grace we have been lifted out of the deceit and corruption of the world. Therefore, we do not behave with cunning and craftiness, not by the fleshly world-soul wisdom, but in the sincerity and purity of God.

Paul said they behaved that way especially toward them. It is much easier to behave in the sincerity and purity of God toward those who are faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, because they also behave in the sincerity and purity of God toward us.

It takes much more wisdom to behave in the sincerity and purity of God in the world, because the world has many men who are insincere and corrupt. Many of them are often predators who view sincerity and purity as weakness, and they try to take advantage of it. Therefore, we must be wise as well as being sincere and pure, wise as serpents but innocent as doves.

### Acknowledging what they write

- **For we write no other thing to you, but rather what ye read or also acknowledge. And I hope ye will also acknowledge until the end, as also ye did acknowledge us in part, because we are your boast, just as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus** (Second Corinthians 1:13-14).

Paul wanted them to know that whatever he wrote to them was available for all of them. They could either read what he wrote or they could acknowledge receipt of it by hearing what he wrote. He wrote nothing in secret to any of them.

Complete openness in communication is very rare among men. The world prefers using secrecy with many things they say. Secrecy protects them against being criticized or challenged. Gossip is an example of secret communication. Gossips are loathsome cowards who love to hide as they attack the reputation of other souls.

Paul hoped they would acknowledge until the end. That means he hoped they would keep their faith in the word of God that Paul and his co-workmen were preaching to them. He hoped they would keep it until the end of their lives. For it is not until the end of our lives that we receive our eternal reward.

When Paul said they did acknowledge them in part, some men believe that Paul meant part of the congregation acknowledged them, but not all. I agree with that interpretation, because Paul spoke later in this letter about men among them who were challenging his apostleship.

Paul said that he and his co-workmen were their boast. The Corinthians could boast about Paul and his co-workmen, because they brought the good news of Christ to them. They brought salvation to them. They brought them from lives of sin to lives of purity and righteousness.

Paul also said the Corinthians were their boast in the day of the Lord Jesus. Paul and his co-workmen were very proud of those they had brought to Christ. Those disciples were their boast. They did not boast about themselves, but about them. At the great day of judgment, when standing before the seat of Christ, they could boast about how those Corinthians believed and obey the good news of Christ because of their efforts.

It is common for righteous fathers and mothers to boast about their children, whom they strive to rear as best as they can. And Paul considered them his children. Remember what he said to them in his previous letter: **“I do not write these things shaming you, but I warn you as my beloved children”** (First Corinthians 4:14).

### Intending to come to them

- **And in this confidence I intended to come to you earlier, so that ye might have a second benefit, and to pass through you into Macedonia, and to come again from Macedonia to you, and by you to be helped on the way toward Judea** (Second Corinthians 1:15-16).

Paul told how he behaved rightly toward them, and he told of their mutual boast toward each other. That was probably the confidence he mentioned here when he told about coming to them.

Paul’s plans were not always realized. Sometimes the Holy Spirit prevented him, as in this example where Paul says he was **“... forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia ...”** (Acts 16:6). Sometimes he was hindered by the devil, as in this example where Paul said to the brothers in Thessalonica, **“... we wanted to come to you, indeed I, Paul, even once and again, and Satan hindered us”** (First Thessalonians 2:18). And there were no doubt many other things that prevented him from doing as he intended.

His earlier intention to come to them was that they might have a second benefit. Whenever Paul came to a congregation he brought them benefits, whether in his preaching, or his healing, or in some other kinds of ways. Do we not all try to bring some kind of benefit or blessing whenever we visit those we love?

What Paul meant by a second benefit is not clear. It probably referred to his desire to visit them twice, both going to and coming from Macedonia. Remember Macedonia was not far from Corinth. He apparently intended to sail to Corinth, journey by land to Macedonia, then return to Corinth to sail to Judea. That way he could visit them twice, thus giving them a double benefit.

### His decisions were always trustworthy

- **Therefore intending this, did I accordingly employ anything in lightness? Or what I decide, do I decide according to flesh, so that it would be with me**

**the yes, yes and the no, no? But God is faithful, because our word toward you became not, yes and no** (Second Corinthians 1:17-18).

Paul employed nothing in lightness. He was never a frivolous man. Everything he employed was in seriousness, including his intention to come to them. Moreover, he did not decide things according to flesh. He did not allow the worldly nature of his flesh to decide things for him. Men who live according to flesh are impulsive and vacillating. One day they will say yes; another day they will say no. That is why the world requires things like binding contracts.

Genuine Christians need no binding contracts among us. We do not live according to flesh, but according to spirit. As Jesus commanded, “... **let your word be, Yes, yes, No, no. And anything beyond these is from evil**” (Matthew 5:37). Our word is our bond.

When Paul said that deciding according to flesh would be the yes yes, and the no no, he meant being impulsive and vacillating with decisions, changing them unpredictably. Jesus’ command that our word be, yes yes or no no, means our decisions are trustworthy. And that was the kind of decision Paul made about coming to them. Only circumstances beyond his control could change it.

## The positiveness of God and Christ

- **For the Son of God, Jesus Christ who was proclaimed among you by us (by me and Silvanus and Timothy) became not, yes and no, but in him has become, yes. For as many as be promises of God, in him is the Yes, and in him the Truly, for glory to God through us** (Second Corinthians 1:19-20).

Not only are the words of Christ trustworthy, but his promises to us are always yes and truly. That means they are always positive for us, and never negative. Remember what Paul said about things happening to us: “**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). And that brings glory to God.

It brings glory to God because we recognize and appreciate his marvelous kindness and goodness toward us, faithfully fulfilling his promises. For those who believe and obey him he has given many wonderful promises, always being positive toward us. In him, indeed, is the Yes and the Truly.

Paul said that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was proclaimed among them by himself (Paul) and Silvanus and Timothy. Timothy is mentioned twenty-four times in the New Testament. And he was named with Paul in the salutation to this letter: “**Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the congregation of God that is at Corinth, with all the sanctified who are in the whole of Achaia**” (Second Corinthians 1:1).

Silvanus is said to be a longer name for Silas, who was a traveling companion of Paul during his second missionary journey. The name Silas is only mentioned in the book of Acts, where it occurs twelve times. The name Silvanus is not mentioned in Acts, but is mentioned in this one to the Corinthians, and in both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians: “**Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the congregation of Thessalonians in God the**

**Father and Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ”** (First Thessalonians 1:1 and Second Thessalonians 1:1).

Silvanus is also mentioned by Peter in his first book. Peter said that Silvanus was the man who transcribed the words of his first book: **“By Silvanus, the faithful brother to you, as I reckon, I wrote because of a few things, exhorting and testifying this to be the true grace of God in which ye stand”** (First Peter 5:12).

Peter needed someone to transcribe his words, because remember what the record says about Peter when he was being examined by the rulers and elders of Israel: **“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).

Being therefore an illiterate man Peter needed someone to transcribe his words for him. And Silvanus was the man through whom Peter wrote his first book.

## God establishes us in Christ

- **Now he who establishes us with you in Christ, and who anointed us, is God. He also is who put a seal on us, and who gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts** (Second Corinthians 1:21-22).

It is God who anointed us to be his priests in the kingdom of God and Christ. As 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).

And it is God who establishes us together in Christ. As Paul said to the Colossians, 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 of the Christ”** (Colossians 2:2).

God also put a seal upon us. The Old Testament tells of a time when God commanded a mark be put upon the foreheads of all the righteous in Jerusalem (that mark was no doubt invisible to men), to spare them from the destruction of the city: **“And the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub, upon which it was, to the threshold of the house, and he called to the man clothed in linen who had the writer’s case by his side. And Jehovah said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and who cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst of it.**

**“And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye through the city after him, and smite. Let not your eye spare, nor have ye pity. Kill utterly the old man, the young man, and the virgin, and little sons, and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary”** (Ezekiel 9:3-6).

The book of Revelation also tells of an agent of heaven having a seal of God. And that agent was not allowed to harm the earth until we have all had the seal of God upon our

foreheads. **“And I saw another agent ascending from the rising of the sun, having a seal of the living God. And he cried out in a great voice to the four agents to whom it was given to them to harm the earth and the sea, saying, Do not harm the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we may seal the bondmen of our God on their foreheads”** (Revelation 7:2-3).

That also refers, of course, to some kind of spiritual seal, not to something that is visible to us. It is a mark of identification that we belong to God. For Paul said, **“Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, the Lord knows those who are his, and, Let every man who names the name of the Lord keep away from unrighteousness”** (Second Timothy 2:19).

God anointed us to be his, he established us together in Christ, and he gave each of us a mark of identification (an invisible one) that we belong to him as his sons. He knows those who are his sons, and he wants his agents in heaven to recognize those who are his sons. Hence, the seal upon us.

God also gave us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. Remember what Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians: **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). And remember what Jesus said to his apostles during 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).

God’s Holy Spirit is in our hearts. And that is God’s pledge. A pledge is a solemn promise. And the existence of God’s Spirit within us is the guarantee of his promise that we will become his sons for eternity in heaven. We know we have that pledge because of his Spirit within our hearts. And we know that we have his Spirit within our hearts because we love his truth and his righteousness.

Our knowledge of his righteousness and our love for it, is evidence to us that his Spirit is in us. And that guarantees our eternal salvation. Therefore, you can be sure that you belong to him when you love truth and obey his righteousness.

### The delay was to spare them

- **But I call God for a witness upon my soul, that I did not yet come to Corinth, sparing you. Not because we lord over your faith, but are co-workmen of your joy, for by faith ye stand** (Second Corinthians 1:23-24).

Paul assured them that he had intended to come to them earlier. However, he did not yet come to them in order to spare them. And he called God for a witness upon his soul that was the reason. Remember how many things he had rebuked them about in his first letter.

Therefore, he obviously did not want to come to them too soon, before they had time to repent and correct what they needed. Otherwise he would not have spared them, and that is not what he wanted. He did not want to chasten them without having given them time to repent so they would not need chastening. He loved them too much.

Many false churches have priests and bishops who lord over the faith of their members. The Roman Catholic church even discourages their members from reading the Bible, telling them instead to obey what their priests say. It is an evil and corrupt church.

Paul and his co-workmen were not like that. They did not lord over the faith of the disciples. As Paul said, they were co-workmen of their joy. They worked with them as they sought to grow in their spirit, seeking to learn more about the will of God and ways to obey it. For that was their joy. It was their joy because of how it improved their souls and brought them closer to eternal salvation.

Paul said they stood by faith, not faith in men—whether such men call themselves priests or bishops, pastors or clerics—but faith in Jesus Christ. Which faith is a living faith that includes obedience and good works. For remember, it is by our works that we are going to be judged at the last day. As John said in his vision of heaven, **“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).

### Coming in sadness or in joy

- **But I determined this in myself, not to come again to you in sadness. For if I make you sad, who then is he who makes me glad except he who is made sad by me? And I wrote this same thing to you, so that when I came, I would not have sadness from whom I ought to rejoice, having been confident toward you all, because my joy is of all of you** (Second Corinthians 2:1-3).

Paul intended to come to them again, but he did not want to come in sadness. The most important thing for all of us is our faithfulness to the will of God. And there were many things about the congregation at Corinth that were not right in God’s sight and needed correcting. Therefore, Paul was in sadness about them.

If he came to them while they were in that condition it would have been necessary for him to further rebuke and chasten them. And that would have made them sad, because nobody enjoys being punished. As the author of Hebrews said, **“But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:11).

Paul would also have been made sad, because every righteous soul is made sad when they must punish someone they love. Where then would be his gladness in coming to them? He wanted to rejoice when he came. They were his joy, as he said to them: **“... my joy is of all of you.”** Hence, Paul would have had no joy in coming to them if he only made them sad.

That was why he wrote those same things to them, the things about them that needed correcting. He wrote them hoping they would correct themselves. If they made the corrections themselves, then when he came he would not have sadness from them instead of rejoicing. He was hoping that would happen, because he had confidence in them all. It takes maturity and strength of character to repent and make corrections about ourselves. Paul was confident they would do it.

Another good lesson for us in those words is that when we need chastening from the Lord, it is much better for us to chasten ourselves and repent, than for chastening to come from the Lord. He no more enjoys chastening us than we do when we must chasten our children, or Paul did when he rebuked and chastened his brothers at Corinth. Therefore, always examine yourself to see if there is anything about you that needs correcting. And when you find something, do not wait for the chastening of the Lord, but chasten yourself and repent.

### His sorrow in writing to them

- **For out of much stress and dismay of heart, through many tears, I wrote to you, not that ye would be grieved, but that ye might know the love that I have so much more for you** (Second Corinthians 2:4).

Every righteous father and mother grieves when they must punish their children, because punishment hurts. And since it is natural to turn away from whatever caused us to hurt, unless children know the cause of their punishment it can turn them away from their parents. Therefore, it is very important for children to know they are being punished because of their bad behavior, not because their parents do not love them. Punishment does not mean they are not loved. On the contrary, punishment is evidence their parents do love them.

Indeed, Fathers and mothers who do not punish bad behavior are the ones who do not love their children. For Solomon said, **“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly”** (Proverbs 13:24). God, being our heavenly Father who loves us, he too chastens us when we need it, as the author of the book of Hebrews said: **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives”** (Hebrews 12:6).

Some misguided parents fail to punish for fear it will turn their children away from them. That will not happen if the children know why they are being punished. In fact, when they are punished fairly, their children will later love them more. For Solomon also said, **“He who rebukes a man shall afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue”** (Proverbs 28:23).

Nevertheless, it is still grievous to punish. Therefore, it caused Paul **“much stress and dismay of heart”** when he rebuked them in his first letter. Although there is much value in chastening wrong behavior, there are special risks involved. And that is probably the main reason why it caused Paul much stress and dismay of heart.

For example, one characteristic of punishment is that it can evoke resistance and retaliation. For example, Solomon said, **“Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words”** (Proverbs 23:9), and, **“He who corrects a scoffer gets himself reviling. And he who reproves a wicked man gets himself a bruise”** (Proverbs 9:7).

Although it is rare for a disciple to be either a fool, a scoffer, or a wicked man, punishment could still give an occasion to evoke resistance and retaliation among those who had doubted the authority of Paul. He spoke of such men farther in this book, calling them false apostles and deceitful workmen: **“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ”** (Second Corinthians 11:13).

Punishing a group can also cause or increase divisions among them. It can provoke disputes about how justified the punishment was. Remember what Paul said about the existing divisions among them: **“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”** (First Corinthians 1:12). The number and severity of his rebukes could have caused a hardening of those divisions. Those who said they were of Apollos or of Cephas could have been less inclined to accept his criticisms.

Also punishment is not only an exercise in training, but it is also a test. It is a test because how punishment is received reveals character. Remember, Jesus’ parable about the man who was sowing seed. How well the seed grew depended upon the ground upon which it fell. Jesus said about the rocky ground, **“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”** (Matthew 13:20-21).

Tribulation and persecution cause sorrow, and that causes stumbling among believers of weak character. Punishment also causes sorrow, and it too can cause stumbling if the recipient is of weak character. Therefore, there was the risk of punishment causing some of the disciples at Corinth to stumble, those who were yet babes in Christ.

Paul knew of the risks he was taking by writing such a critical letter to them. And that was no doubt the primary reason he suffered **“much stress and dismay of heart, through many tears”** when he wrote them. Nevertheless, he did not inform them of how he felt when he wrote his first letter. And the reason was probably because he was also testing them, to see how they would respond. Paul says more about that farther on.

Paul also said it was to show his love for them: **“I wrote to you, not that ye would be grieved, but that ye might know the love that I have so much more for you.”** Remember why the Lord chastens us: **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives.”** And that was an important reason why Paul had rebuked them in his first letter. It was not to cause them grief, but to show the love that he had so much more for them.

## He who caused sadness

- **But if any man has caused sadness, he has not caused me sadness, but in part (that I may not bear down) you all** (Second Corinthians 2:5).

Paul is here referring to the man who had his father’s wife. Remember, Paul said in his first letter to them, **“Fornication is actually heard among you, and such fornication that is not even named among the Gentiles, for some man to have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up and did not rather mourn, so that he who committed this deed might be taken away from the midst of you.”**

**“For I truly, as being absent in the body but present in the spirit, I have already, as though present, judged the man who committed this thing this way. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh,**

so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (First Corinthians 5:1-5).

That man had caused sadness, not just to his father for taking his wife, but to the whole congregation. He brought shame to them because he was a member. And that is true of every man who sins. When we sin we bring some shame not just to ourselves, but to our families and to whatever other groups to which we belong. That is especially true of the church, because we are striving to promote righteousness. Indeed, the devil and his disciples love to smear us by broadcasting our failings.

Nevertheless, Paul tried to be gentle about how the man caused them sadness. He did not want to bear down on the man who had repented and was filled with sorrow. Paul said the man had not caused him sadness, but in some degree to all of them. In other words, the shame the man caused was limited. And although Paul did not say it, the sorrow and shame was no doubt greatly diminished because of their punishment of him and his repentance.

## Punishment and forgiveness

- **Sufficient to such a man is this punishment by the many, so that instead, for you rather to forgive and encourage, lest perhaps such a man would be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I beseech you to affirm love for him** (Second Corinthians 2:6-8).

From what Paul said here in his second letter it is obvious the congregation had obeyed Paul and rejected the man. It is also obvious that the man himself had repented and turned from his sin. Congregations only have two ways to punish bad behavior: (1) verbally with rebukes, and (2) socially by shunning or withdrawing fellowship from the guilty disciple. Both methods can be very effective to combat and correct sinful actions in people who are otherwise righteous.

The man who had his father’s wife was both rebuked and shunned. And the effect was to cause his repentance. It caused him to repent because he had the right kind of spirit. Therefore, Paul said the punishment by the many was sufficient for the man. Consequently, they should no longer reject him, but rather forgive and encourage him. It was important for them to forgive and encourage, because Paul said, **“lest perhaps such a man would be swallowed up with too much sorrow.”**

Remorse can break a man’s spirit, especially if he continues to be rejected. Too much sorrow can swallow up a man. And that is not the purpose of punishment. Punishment serves at least four purposes:

- to discourage bad behavior
- to enforce justice with proper retribution
- to provide examples to warn others
- to encourage repentance, changing the heart of the guilty to want to do right

Being swallowed up with too much sorrow can cause the guilty soul to quit trying to do anything. And that is not a goal of punishment. (Capital punishment by the government enforces justice, and provides an example to warn others.)

Consequently, after punishment has had its desired effect, encouragement should be used to affirm love. But not too soon, however, lest the love and encouragement have the effect of rewarding the misbehavior, and consequently defeat the effect of punishment. Good judgment is always needed with the application of anything.

## Knowing the proof of them

- **For I also wrote for this, so that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things** (Second Corinthians 2:9).

Here is where Paul now tells them the reason he wrote the way he did was to test them. He wanted proof that they were obedient in all things. Paul wanted proof because God wants proof. That is a major reason why we live in this world of trials and temptations. God is testing our souls to see who is worthy of becoming his sons for eternity.

Even Jesus was tested. He was tested in many ways. His greatest test was having to endure his trial and crucifixion. He was also tested with temptations. Remember this passage: **“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”** (Matthew 4:1). Therefore, do not resent being tested. It provides proof of our worthiness.

Nevertheless, do not expose yourself to too many tests. Remember the last part of what we call the Lord’s prayer: **“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 6:13). Let the Lord decide when and how to test you.

## Joint forgiveness

- **But to whom ye forgive anything, I too. For I also, whom I have forgiven (if anything), I have forgiven because of you in the presence of Christ, so that we may not be exploited by Satan. For we are not ignorant of his methods** (Second Corinthians 2:10-11).

Paul was joining them in forgiving. He said he was forgiving because of them. Paul had apparently developed such confidence in them that he trusted their judgment about who to forgive. And that is probably what he meant when he said he had forgiven because of them in the presence of Christ. As long as they were in the presence of Christ, as long as they stood faithful to the Lord and his will for us, then Paul would join them in forgiving.

It is very important that we all be united in our forgiving. It is wrong when some congregation forgives (justifiably) but some others will not forgive. That kind of divisiveness gives occasion for us to be exploited by Satan. He is not only the great enemy of God, he is also our great enemy as long as we are faithful to the Lord. And it is to the devil’s advantage for us to be divided, especially in matters like forgiveness. That kind of division weakens us, and it weakens our ability to promote the good news of Christ.

Paul said we are not ignorant of Satan’s methods. Those methods include deceit and slander as well as temptations to sin. And any sign of divisiveness among us about right and wrong gives him occasion to exploit us with his deceit and slander. Remember however,

our forgiveness must be in accord with the principles and examples given in the word of God, not indiscriminantly.

## Coming to Troas, going to Macedonia

- **Now having come to Troas for the good news of the Christ, and a door having been opened to me in the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, my not finding Titus my brother. But having departed from them, I went forth into Macedonia** (Second Corinthians 2:12-13).

Troas was on the northwest coast of Asia Minor, about a hundred and thirty miles south-east of Philippi across the Aegean sea. Remember, Philippi was in Macedonia, which is now part of modern Greece. Paul went to Troas on his second and third missionary journeys. Remember, after his first journey he had separated from Barnabas and instead brought Silas with him the second time (see Acts 15:39-40). Nothing is said about anybody going with him when he began his third journey, although it is probable he departed with some other men.

The door having opened to Paul no doubt symbolized having an opportunity to promote the good news of Christ. What and where that opportunity was, however, is not explained. The passage suggests Paul was expecting to find Titus his Christian brother there. And not having found him Paul had no rest in his spirit. However, that too is somewhat unclear.

It may mean he was more burdened in his work because Titus was not there to help him. However, it probably means he was concerned about why Titus was not there, because he said he had no rest in his spirit. And that may have hastened Paul's departure to go forth to Macedonia, where he could search for him.

Titus is never mentioned in the description of Paul's journeys that is given in the book of Acts. However, he is mentioned thirteen times in the New Testament, nine of which are in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Titus was a Gentile and he was much loved by Paul. He was also prominent in Paul's evangelistic efforts, working faithfully with him. Indeed, Paul's letter to Titus is included in the New Testament. Nevertheless, we have no information about how they met.

Remember, there are many missing details about many things in the Bible, but none of them are important for us to know. The Holy Spirit of God included everything we need to know about God and his will for us. Whatever is not told is either not for us to know or it would have lengthened the Bible and made it a less practical volume.

Dear reader, I must tell you that the more I have become familiar with the contents of the Bible the more I love how concise its words are, and the less satisfied I am with the shallow wordiness of all other books about religion and philosophy. I must also say with dismay, that the ideas I have read in most books about God, Christ, and the Bible, could have been expressed in one-tenth or less the number of words used.

## The aroma of knowledge of Christ

- **And thanks to God who always causes us to triumph in the Christ, and who makes manifest the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place, through**

**us. Because we are a fragrance of Christ to God in those being saved and in those perishing; to the one an odor of death for death, and to the other an aroma of life for life. And who is adequate for these things?** (Second Corinthians 2:14-16).

We owe thanks to God because of a host of reasons, beginning with our very existence. Paul expressed thanks to God in this case for always causing us to triumph in the Christ. We experience many failures and defeats in this sinful world, but in Christ we always triumph. Whatever we do in Christ, in our obedience to him, in our service to him, we always triumph. We always triumph because God causes it.

However, that does not mean our results always succeed. Even Jesus himself did not succeed in everything he did. For example, he did not succeed in persuading all of the Jews to repent and believe in him. What Paul meant by God always causing us to triumph in the Christ is the triumphal effect on us, not on others. Jesus did not succeed in persuading all of the Jews to repent and believe, but his efforts to persuade them, together with everything else he did in his sinless life of obedience to God was a triumph for him.

Indeed, it was the greatest of all triumphs, because it proved his worthiness to reign with God over all things. Moreover, his perfect life of obedience to God enabled him to defeat Satan and save our souls for eternal sonship in heaven. Therefore, God always causes us to triumph in the Christ, because our faithfulness gives us eternal sonship with him.

Paul then compared the knowledge of Christ, and our lives in Christ, with aromas. Paul said that God makes manifest the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place, through them. It was through the apostles and their co-workmen that the knowledge of God has been revealed in every place. The knowledge of God has spread like an aroma everywhere.

Moreover, we who are being saved are also an aroma. We are like a fragrance of Christ to God. Moreover, we are like an aroma of life for life in those being saved. But in those who are perishing we are an odor of death for death. That means we radiate beauty to those being saved, but we stink to those who are perishing.

What Paul said is just more evidence that the righteous and the unrighteous are repulsive to each other. We hate wickedness and they hate righteousness. As Solomon said, **“An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, and he who is upright in the way is an abomination to a wicked man”** (Proverbs 29:27). Solomon also said about God, **“Those who are perverse in heart are an abomination to Jehovah, but such as are perfect in their way are his delight”** (Proverbs 11:20).

Paul used the figure of aromas to make that contrast: **“In those being saved and in those perishing, to the one an odor of death for death, and to the other an aroma of life for life.”** Remember that when you wonder why the world hates us.

After making that comparison, Paul then asked, **“And who is adequate for these things?”** Since he was speaking about being **“a fragrance of Christ to God,”** he wondered who was adequate to be such a fragrance. For we are all so inferior to Christ; we **“... all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23). But thanks to Christ, Paul also said about us, **“... but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God”**

(First Corinthians 6:11). God has made us who believe and obey him, to be as a fragrance of Christ to God.

## Not huckstering, but as from purity

- **For we are not as other men, huckstering the word of God, but as from purity. But we speak in Christ as from God in the sight of God** (Second Corinthians 2:17).

There are many men who are mere hucksters of the word of God. I have heard them over the radio, and I have seen them on television. They even peddle such things as wallets that are supposed to be blessed by God to give you more money. They peddle what they call prayer cloths that are supposed to ensure that whatever you ask God for he will give you.

As Paul said, they are deceitful workmen: **“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).

Such hucksters and deceitful workmen have existed from the beginning. Paul contrasted such men with himself, when he said, **“Actually some even preach the Christ because of envy and strife, and some also because of good-will. Some indeed proclaim the Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to bring affliction to my bonds. But some from love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the good news. What then? Except in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice, but also I will rejoice”** (Philippians 1:15-18).

We are not hucksters of the word of God, seeking to gain money and popularity, but instead we spread the word of God as from purity. Neither Christ nor any of his apostles ever sought any kind of financial contribution for themselves. All they ever accepted was the basic essentials of living: food and drink, clothing and shelter. Although Christ once borrowed a donkey temporarily upon which to ride into Jerusalem, but that was only to fulfill a prophecy (see Matthew 21:1-5).

We speak in Christ as from God. We do not proclaim ourselves, but we are spokesmen of Christ. We speak in him. It is because we are in him that we speak. We are in him because we are his body on the earth. Remember how Paul spoke of that, when he said, **“Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:27).

And we speak that way as from God. When we proclaim the word of God, it is as if God were speaking through us. For what we say is not of us but from God. Indeed, Jesus said about himself: **“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 12:49). And so it is when we genuinely proclaim the word of God.

And we speak that way in the sight of God, because he approves us. Jesus said to his apostles after his resurrection, **“As the Father has sent me, I also send you”** (John 20:21). And as he sent his apostles to proclaim his good news of salvation, so we too have been sent by him. He did not choose us personally, but when we became his disciples we

became his representatives. Through our lives and through our words we speak as from him because we are now the body of Christ upon the earth; his Spirit works within us—as long as we are faithful to him.

## Commendations

- **Are we beginning again to commend ourselves, unless we need, as some men, commendatory letters to you or commendatory from you? Ye are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men, being seen that ye are a letter of Christ, administered by us, written not in ink, but in the Spirit of the living God, not in stony tablets, but in fleshly tablets, in hearts** (Second Corinthians 3:1-3).

When men begin to proclaim the good news of Christ they need some kind of evidence of their authenticity. In the early church the special gifts of the Holy Spirit served as evidence they were from God. However, those gifts are no longer given. We have the testimony of the New Testament to verify that we are proclaiming the word of God.

When Paul said they spoke in Christ as from God in the sight of God, that did not mean they were commending themselves again. Paul and his co-workmen did not need commendatory letters to them or from them. The very existence of the congregation at Corinth was their letter of commendation. And that letter was written in the hearts of Paul and his co-workmen. It was written in their hearts because of the great love they had for them.

And that letter (the faithful congregation at Corinth) was also known and read by all men, all men who would look. It was seen that they were a letter of Christ. They were a letter of Christ because they were faithful to Christ. As a letter, the congregation at Corinth communicated to all men that they belonged to Christ.

And that figurative letter, which symbolized their faithfulness, had been administered by Paul and his co-workmen. Thus, the congregation itself was a living letter of commendation for Paul and his co-workmen. And it was written not in ink, but in the Spirit of the living God. The hearts of the disciples at Corinth were changed by their faith in Jesus Christ. Their thoughts and actions were now guided by the Spirit of God, not the spirit of the devil, which is **“the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2).

That letter of commendation was written not in stony tablets, like those of the ten commandments, but in fleshly tablets, in hearts. Jeremiah gives a prophecy for Israel where Jehovah tells about writing his laws on their hearts: **“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”** (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

And that new covenant was for all people; not only Hebrews but also Gentiles. The people of God now are not those who are born into the Hebrew race. Souls from all nations now become the people of God by hearing his word, having it put into our minds and written on our hearts, and then obeying it.

## Confidence toward God through Christ

- **And we have such confidence toward God through Christ, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to reckon anything as from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us qualified helpers of a new covenant, not of a document, but of a Spirit, for the document kills but the Spirit makes alive** (Second Corinthians 3:4-6).

Although we do not succeed in converting every soul, nevertheless, “... **we have such confidence toward God through Christ**” that our labors are not in vain. For there will always be some who will hear and obey our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, we should never let such confidence make us proud and overconfident, because Paul also said that we are not sufficient of ourselves to reckon anything as from ourselves. Our sufficiency is from God, not ourselves. Always remember these words: “**He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord**” (First Corinthians 1:31).

Paul said that God also made them qualified helpers of a new covenant. That was the covenant God said to Jeremiah that he would make: Giving his laws into our minds, and writing them on our hearts; and he would be our God, and we would be his people. That new covenant is the good news of Christ. Paul said that God made him and his co-workmen qualified helpers of that new covenant.

And when we proclaim and promote the good news of Christ we also become co-workmen with Paul. We become qualified by God through our renewed spirit (having been begotten again through immersion in water for the remission of our sins) and our knowledge of God’s holy word.

Paul also said that new covenant is not of a document, but of a Spirit. He meant the new covenant was not a legal system, such as the law of Moses. The new covenant is of the Holy Spirit of God, which enters into us when we become disciples of Christ. It enters into us (1) through our knowledge and acceptance of the commands of Christ, and (2) by our strengthened conscience, enlightened by our knowledge of the will of God. I explain those processes much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul said the document kills but the Spirit makes alive. Remember, he spoke at length in the book of Romans about how faith in Christ was superior to law. Law (the document) kills because no man is able to keep it perfectly. The Spirit makes alive because when we become a part of Christ, we are redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. We receive eternal salvation with eternal life.

When the Holy Spirit enters into us it is God’s guarantee of our eternal life. Remember, Paul said that God “**is who put a seal on us, and who gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts**” (Second Corinthians 1:22). Thus, having God’s Holy Spirit in us makes us alive (spiritually). And that happens through our faith and obedience to Christ. Remember

however, the Holy Spirit in us does not give us any kind of supernatural powers. It influences our lives by our knowledge of the word of God and the love of righteousness in us. It is an energizing spirit in our hearts for God's righteousness. And that is how we know it is in us: when we love and obey God's righteousness through his Son Jesus Christ.

## The old and new administrations

- **But if the administration of death in writings engraved on stones occurred in glory, so that the sons of Israel could not gaze upon the face of Moses because of the fading glory of his countenance, how will the administration of the Spirit not be more in glory?**
- **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** (Second Corinthians 3:7-10).

Paul spoke of the law of Moses as **“the administration of death”** and **“the administration of condemnation.”** The law of Moses was the greatest law ever given to man. I know of no other law superior to it for justice and righteousness. Nevertheless, it was an administration of condemnation and death.

It was that way because it was a legal system. And all legal systems condemn because no man is able to keep every law all the time. And any violation of God's law brings death, just as with Adam. Only Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God was able to live without sin. I explain why God made it that way in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The law of Moses occurred in such glory that the face of Moses shone after speaking with Jehovah. 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 [Jehovah].**

**“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. And Moses called to them. And Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke to them”** (Exodus 34:29-31).

Paul asked if the administration of death (the law of Moses) occurred in glory, how will the administration of the Spirit (the good news of Christ) not be more in glory? The law of Moses did indeed have glory. It was an awesome sight when the ten commandments was given, because the record says, **“And mount Sinai, the whole of it, smoked, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire, and the smoke of it ascended as the smoke of a furnace. And the whole mount quaked greatly”** (Exodus 19:18).

The book of Hebrews also says about it, **“For ye have not come to a mountain being felt, and which burned with fire, and to darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of words, of which those who heard begged that a word not be added to them. For they did not bear that which was commanded, if**

**even a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned. And so fearful was that which was made visible, that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling”** (Hebrews 12:18-21).

Paul answered his question about the two administrations by saying **“the administration of righteousness excels much more in glory.”** Indeed, the contrast of glory is so great that Paul said **“that which has been glorified [the law of Moses], “has not been glorified in this regard ... .”** The glory of the good news of Christ is so much greater that it completely eclipses the glory of the law of Moses. It is like a searchlight shining upon a flashlight.

### That which is abolished

- **For if that which is abolished was through glory, much more that which remains is in glory** (Second Corinthians 3:11).

Notice how Paul said **“that which is abolished”** when he was speaking about the law of Moses. In the sight of God the law of Moses was abolished with the establishment of the kingdom of God on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. However, the Jews rejected the Son of God, and preferred to cling to their law of Moses. They kept it as the law of their land. Therefore, all Jews in Israel were required to keep it, whether they were disciples of Christ or not.

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote about the law of Moses when he said, **“In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance”** (Hebrews 8:13). It was near disappearance because God was going to destroy it himself. Forty years after Jesus began his ministry, God sent the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And now it is impossible for anyone to obey the law of Moses. Jews now obey a perverted hybrid law that includes a few of the old laws of Moses together with a host of laws they have invented for themselves.

What now remains before God is the good news of Christ. And everything about it is in glory, especially the glorious hope it gives us of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven. What could possibly be more glorious for us? Think about it! We will be sons of God in heaven for all eternity. We will be the princes of the King of kings, ruling with him over all things in the magnificent and incorruptible world of heaven.

### Moses veiled his face

- **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** (Second Corinthians 3:12-13).

Here is the passage that describes how Moses put a veil over his face because it was glowing and caused the people to be afraid: **“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 [Jehovah].**

**“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. And Moses called to them. And Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. And afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he gave them in commandment all that Jehovah had spoken with him on mount Sinai. And when Moses was done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.**

**“But when Moses went in before Jehovah to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spoke to the sons of Israel that which he was commanded. And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. And Moses put the veil upon his face again until he went in to speak with him”** (Exodus 34:29-35).

According to that passage the glowing of Moses’ face would gradually fade after being away from Jehovah. Not only was the veil used to keep from frightening the people, but it was also used to prevent them from gazing on the end of the fading. Perhaps there was the danger that the people would misinterpret that fading to think God was departing from Moses. That would have been worse than simply frightening them. Therefore, the veil concealed the whole process.

However, Paul said we have such a hope that we use great boldness. There is no need to conceal anything from us. Our faith and hope give us great confidence. As Paul was a priest of God, so we too are God’s priests. We are the new royal priesthood, as 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).

And we boldly and broadly proclaim the excellencies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For he called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Therefore, we do not conceal the glory of God’s presence in us, which is manifested in our changed lives. Instead, we use great boldness to proclaim it.

## Veils over hardened minds

- **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).

Paul now uses the veil figuratively, to explain why the (unbelieving) Jews do not understand. Their minds were hardened. There is a kind of mental veil that conceals from them the truth of the scriptures in the Old Testament. They read the words but they do not correctly understand them because a veil lies upon their heart. And that veil upon their heart continued to the day Paul wrote this book, and it continues even to this day.

It is only when their hearts turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that the veil is removed and they can correctly understand. It is a remarkable fact of the human mind that different people can see the same thing, yet perceive it entirely different. Some see partially and some see fully; some see correctly and some see falsely.

That is one of the evils of prejudice; it prevents seeing the truth of things. And that is one of the blessings of being humble and open-minded. It takes away prejudice and enables us to see more fully and more correctly.

## The Lord's Spirit and liberty

- **Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty** (Second Corinthians 3:17).

Paul earlier said much about the Spirit. For example, he said, “... **our sufficiency is from God, who also made us qualified helpers of a new covenant, not of a document, but of a Spirit, for the document kills but the Spirit makes alive.**” He also told of the lesser glory of the administration of death (the legal system of Moses), and the greater glory of the administration of the Spirit (the good news of Christ).

God made Paul and his co-workmen qualified helpers of a new covenant and of a Spirit, a Spirit that makes alive. And the administration of that Spirit transcends in glory. And now Paul explains how the Lord Jesus Christ is the Spirit. His Spirit in us is part of the new covenant, and it makes alive because it transcends in glory any other spirit.

Now remember, a spirit is energy, an activating force. And energy can be used for good or for evil. Living spirits are intelligent energy. The greatest of all spirits are those of God and of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. They are divine and eternal. They also have free will and are creative of good.

As offspring of God our spirits are also divine and eternal. They also have free will, but unlike God and Christ, the spirits of men are often creative of evil. God wants us to have the Spirit of Christ within us so that we will be creative of good. However, because we have free will that choice is ours to make.

Regarding freedom, Paul said that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. A spirit being energy, the Spirit of Christ always energizes that which is good and right and just. It always promotes truth and righteousness. And when a people is influenced by the Spirit of Christ, they are given freedom.

Freedom is a consequence of having a spirit of righteousness. This adulterous generation worships freedom, claiming it produces righteousness. They have it backwards. And wherever that false philosophy is applied it fails. Freedom is a consequence of a people being guided by the Spirit of Christ, a spirit that energizes that which is good, right, and just. Freedom without the Spirit of Christ will always fail.

In my own country in my lifetime I have seen the loss of a huge number of our freedoms. Bureaucracies have grown enormously, heaping upon the people the burden of more and more rules and regulations, restrictions and controls. The only few freedoms that have increased are freedoms to commit sin and wickedness. The people are losing their liberties because they are forsaking the Spirit of Christ.

People who are influenced by the Spirit of the Lord do not need rules and regulations, restrictions and controls. They do not need to be *forced* to live right, because they *want* to live right. All they need is the wisdom to know *how* to live right. Hence, they enjoy the

liberty that sinners are not given. When sinners do have liberty it is soon taken from them, because they use it wrongfully.

## Transformed into his likeness

- **But we all, with unveiled face seeing by reflection the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same likeness from glory to glory, just as from the Spirit of the Lord** (Second Corinthians 3:18).

As faithful disciples of Christ our faces are not veiled. We can see the truth of God and Christ clearly. And we see the glory of the Lord by reflection. We see his glory reflected in the words of the Holy Bible. We cannot see him physically, but we do see him conceptually in our minds. And the more carefully we study and learn the words of the Bible the more clearly we can see his glory reflected in it.

Moreover, we all **“are transformed into the same likeness from glory to glory ... .”** The more we study and learn and believe his holy word from the Bible, the more our minds and our lives are transformed into his likeness. And that transformation is from glory to glory. We are continually increasing our glory as we are increasingly transformed into his likeness. And that glory is manifested in how we think, speak, and act. It lifts us up out of the mire of sin and elevates our lives to higher levels of spiritual greatness.

And that marvelous transformation into his likeness is from the Spirit of the Lord. It is from his energizing influence that we are transformed into his likeness. His Spirit works within us for a glorious transformation of our lives. In contrast the spirit of the devil works in the sons of disobedience for evil. We have all seen how children become more like their fathers and mothers as they grow in their influence. As children of God we too become more like him as our spirit grows in his influence.

## We do not become discouraged

- **Because of this (having this ministry), in as much as we received mercy, we do not become discouraged** (Second Corinthians 4:1).

Remember, at the beginning of this book Paul told about the severe afflictions he and his co-workmen had suffered in Asia: **“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”** (Second Corinthians 1:8-9).

And now Paul says that because of having their ministry they do not become discouraged, because they have received mercy. Suffering such afflictions because of some other endeavor would certainly have discouraged anybody. However, we have received the special mercy of God—the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal sonship in heaven with him. Therefore we do not become discouraged. As long as we have our faith and hope in Christ we never give up.

## Commending ourselves to every conscience

- **But we have renounced the covert things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor misrepresenting the word of God, but by the disclosure of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God** (Second Corinthians 4:2).

The covert things of shame are sinful things done in secret and in darkness, including methods of deceit. As faithful disciples of Christ we have renounced those things. We do not walk in craftiness, nor do we misrepresent the word of God.

The world is filled with men who walk in craftiness. They are the wicked men, predators of other men. Many of them have carefully cultivated respectable reputations. They are like the scholars and Pharisees that Jesus uttered a curse against: **“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). I describe much more about the wicked in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

There are also many men who misrepresent the word of God. In fact, most modern men who teach or preach about Christ misrepresent the word of God. Theology professors are among the worse. I often groan in my spirit when I see speakers on television describing and explaining the Holy Bible (through closed caption because of my hearing disorder). I groan because their teachings are so full of errors and perversions of the truth. Often they do not even quote the scriptures correctly, but paraphrase wildly. They manipulate the ignorant by entertaining them, not teaching them the truth.

Most of the modern churches, Catholic and protestant alike, misrepresent the word of God. The Catholics misrepresent the holy scriptures to support their many erroneous doctrines and their perverse hierarchy of authority.

Protestants commonly preach salvation by faith only. They fail to teach what Jesus commanded about how to become a genuine disciple. Most of them also misrepresent the word of God by preaching the false doctrine of once-saved-always-saved. Many of them have misrepresented the word of God by teaching that our eternal salvation or condemnation has been predetermined, with nothing we can do to change it.

But Paul and his co-workmen have disclosed the truth of the word of God, without misrepresentation. And we who faithfully proclaim the truth, which is what the word of God teaches, are following in their steps.

Many in this adulterous generation of Americans are openly contemptuous of truth, even denying the reality of it. They scoff at truth like Pilate did when he asked Jesus if he was a king. Jesus answered him, **“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 then asked, **“What is truth?”** (John 18:37-38). It was a mock-question scoffing about truth, because Pilate did not even wait for an answer.

Paul also said they were commending themselves to every conscience of men before God. To commend is to express approval. Paul and his co-workmen were presenting themselves

as spokesmen for truth to be judged by every man's conscience. They preached the righteousness of God, which every conscience approves. There is nothing they taught that would violate a pure conscience. Only a man with a perverted or destroyed conscience would condemn them.

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). There is no law against the fruit of the Spirit of God because it is supported by every pure and uncorrupted conscience.

Every man knows by instinct (see Romans 2:15) that love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control are things of righteousness to be commended. And Paul and his co-workmen were commending themselves to every conscience of men by proclaiming those things of the righteousness of God.

Nevertheless remember, a man's conscience can be destroyed. For Paul said, **“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).

## The good news is concealed to the perishing

- **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).

We were all perishing because of our previous sins. But that was before Christ came and redeemed us, us meaning all who believe in him. And because we love truth and righteousness, because we are humble in spirit, and because we are open-minded to learn, his good news of salvation has been revealed to us. And that enabled us to believe in him.

The good news of Christ is concealed to those who are perishing. It is concealed to them because they do not believe in Christ. They do not believe in him because they are proud and closed-minded, and they hate truth and righteousness. Consequently, the god of this age, the devil, has blinded their minds about the truth.

The devil blinds their minds by distorting their thinking. He can distort their thinking because they are proud, closed-minded, and hate truth and righteousness. The devil plants evil thoughts in their minds, either by their own imagination or by the influence of false teachers. And those evil ideas take root and prevent them from seeing the truth of Christ.

The world is filled with evil ideas that blind the minds of the unbelieving. The theory of evolution is one of the most famous and successful of the ideas the devil has used to blind the minds of the unbelieving. The evil religion of Mohammed is another one.

However, because of the kind of spirit we have, we are not blinded; the good news of Christ has revealed the truth to us. Therefore, the light of the good news of the glory of the Christ shines forth to us and from us. The light of the good news enlightens us of the glory of Christ because he is a likeness of God.

Through Christ we can see God, although we cannot yet see his form; that will come after the day of judgment. We see God now by perceiving the kind of spirit that his Son Jesus Christ has, because he is a likeness of God. And it is a glorious spirit, because it is the epitome of everything that is good, right, pure, and beautiful.

## Preaching and serving through Christ

- **For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves are your bondmen through Jesus** (Second Corinthians 4:5).

Paul and his co-workmen certainly were not preaching themselves. They were not proclaiming their own ideas. They were not seeking popularity. They preached Christ Jesus as Lord, and they taught his commands. But by so preaching and teaching they were persecuted and rejected by the world.

They preached Christ Jesus as Lord, and themselves as bondmen of his disciples through him. Through Christ, Paul and his co-workmen were bondmen of the disciples of Christ. They were bondmen of them because they served them. They were not bondmen in the sense of being under the command of the disciples. They were bondmen of the disciples in the sense of serving them under the command of Christ.

## Out of darkness light is to shine

- **Because it is God who said, Out of darkness light is to shine, who shone in our hearts for an enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ** (Second Corinthians 4:6).

God said light would shine out of darkness when he first created the world: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light”** (Genesis 1:1-3).

In the beginning the world was in darkness, but God brought light into it. In the same kind of way we were in the darkness of sin and ignorance. But in the presence of his Son Jesus Christ, God shone into our hearts to enlighten us with the knowledge of his glory. For remember, Jesus said, **“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 presence of Jesus in the world now enables us to better know and understand what God is like. It enlightens us about God’s glory, both because of the things Jesus taught and because of how he lived. For remember, Jesus is a likeness of God himself.

During the last supper, when Philip asked Jesus to see the Father, Jesus said 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? 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).

We can also be in the presence of Jesus by studying the Bible record of how he lived and the things he taught. Not in a physical way but in a spiritual way, not about his physical appearance but about the character of his soul. And learning Christ from the record of the Bible, is light shining in our hearts, enabling us to gain knowledge of the glory of God.

## We have this treasure in earthen vessels

- **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us, restricted in everything, yet not confined, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed** (Second Corinthians 4:7-9).

Jesus is the light, and the treasure Paul spoke about is **“the knowledge of the glory of God.”** Paul said that treasure, that priceless treasure, is in earthen vessels. Those vessels are the sacred books of the Holy Bible. And it is our duty to preserve the knowledge contained in those books, because like all earthen vessels those books gradually perish. Hence, we must continually replace those earthen vessels.

However, the devil and his disciples have been trying to pervert and destroy the knowledge contained in them from the beginning. Therefore, it is a continual battle not only to replace those books, but to preserve the knowledge they contain in its original purity.

I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ that this treasure has not only been preserved, but is now widely available for those who want it. Before I translated the New Testament I spend several weeks studying about the original Bible manuscripts. I wrote an essay about what I found. I titled it *Preserving the Word of God*. It tells something about the struggle to preserve the purity of the sacred scriptures. You can read that essay in the epilogue to this commentary.

Paul said we have this treasure (the knowledge of the glory of God) in earthen vessels so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not from us. The knowledge of the glory of God is marvelously powerful. The author of the book of Hebrews said about it, **“For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12). It has the power to transform the world. Wherever it has gone, and has been believed and obeyed, it has elevated and exalted people.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the excellency of its power may be from God and not from us. The excellency of the power of the knowledge of the glory of God is from God and not from men. We who proclaim that knowledge have little power. In fact, we are among the weakest of men. For Paul and the other apostles were

restricted in everything  
perplexed  
persecuted  
cast down

Yet because God was with them they were

not confined  
not despairing

not forsaken  
not destroyed

They were continually restricted by those who opposed them. But that did not confine them, because they kept preaching, and the kingdom of God kept growing. They were often perplexed because of the viciousness of their opposition. But that did not cause them to despair, because they continually had the hope of Christ. They were frequently persecuted. But they were not forsaken, because God was always with them. Many times they were cast down. But they were not destroyed, because God always lifted them up and saved their souls for eternal sonship.

The Bible record, both the Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with examples of those things happening to men of God. Therefore dear reader, take courage and continue in the faith so that you can join them in heaven to rejoice with God and Christ.

### Death works in us but life in you

- **Always carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that also the life of Jesus may be made visible in our body. For we who live are always given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that also the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death indeed works in us, but life in you** (Second Corinthians 4:10-12).

When Paul said they were always carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, he was speaking of the sacrifice of their worldly lives; it was, of course, a figurative dying. They had forsaken everything to become apostles of Jesus. Remember, Peter once said to Jesus, **“Lo, we have forsaken all, and followed thee”** (Matthew 19:27). That was how they were carrying around in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

And by so doing they were able to make visible in their bodies the life of Jesus. That means their manner of life reflected the life of Christ. And when we follow the steps of our Lord and Savior, we too will sacrifice our fleshly lives, our worldliness, and live so as to reflect the life of Jesus in our lives. We are always given over to death for Jesus' sake because we are continually forsaking (dying to) the sinful pleasures of the world. And that makes visible to the world the life of Christ. Through us it shows them what Jesus was like.

Paul also spoke to the Colossians about how we died for Christ: **“If therefore ye were raised with the Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Think on the things above, not the things on the earth. For ye died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God. When the Christ, our life, is made known, then ye also will be made known with him in glory. Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry”** (Colossians 3:1-5).

When Paul said that death works in them, he was referring to how the apostles gave up their worldly lives by forsaking all and followed Christ to serve him. Hence, the figurative death of their worldly lives worked in them for the cause of Christ. When Paul said that life works in us, he was referring to our eternal spirits.

He said a little farther that **“the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day”** (Second Corinthians 4:16). Life works in us by renewing our inner man (our eternal spirit) day by day. Remember, Jesus also said, **“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”** (John 5:24).

### We believe, therefore we speak

- **And having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, therefore I spoke, we also believe, and therefore we speak, knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up through Jesus, and will present us with you** (Second Corinthians 4:13-14).

The passage that Paul quoted is from the Psalms: **“Gracious is Jehovah, and righteous. Yea, our God is merciful. Jehovah preserves the simple. I was brought low, and he saved me. Return to thy rest, O my soul, for Jehovah has dealt bountifully with thee. For thou have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from falling. I will walk before Jehovah in the land of the living. I believed, therefore I have spoken, but I was greatly afflicted”** (Psalm 116:5-10).

That is a psalm of love for and faith in Jehovah. Paul used it to illustrate a spirit of faith. And he said that he and the other apostles also had the same spirit of faith. They too believed and they too spoke. Paul and the other apostles knew that God, who raised up the Lord Jesus, would also raise them up through Jesus, and he would present them with all who believe. God will present the apostles with us when we all go to heaven.

And with that faith they spoke the good news of Christ to the world. They devoted their lives to speaking the good news of Christ, because they knew that God would raise them up in the afterlife. They had the same spirit of faith as the psalmist who said, **“I believed, therefore I have spoken ... .”**

### All things are for your sakes

- **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** (Second Corinthians 4:15).

God’s goal for creating the world and for creating us was to have sons for eternity with him in heaven. This world is a place of testing to see who makes themselves worthy to be his sons. Therefore, all things are for our sakes. 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). God calls us to fulfill his purpose of having sons who love him and trust him, and who will live with him for eternity.

The grace Paul mentioned is the grace of God. And all things are for our sakes, so that the grace of God may abound for the glory of God. God wants his grace to abound for us, so that it will bring glory to him. God deserves the highest glory because he created all things, and he sent his only begotten Son into the world to save our souls. Moreover, it is

vital for us to give him the highest glory because only he knows how we should live. It is to our benefit when we glorify him. Every time someone disobeys him evil results.

Paul said God's grace has multiplied **"because of the thankfulness of the many."** When we recognize God's lordship, and give him the thankfulness he deserves, then he can multiply his grace upon us. He can multiply his grace upon us when we are thankful, because we will use his blessings to create good. And that brings him glory and honor because we are thankful.

It is when men turn from him and rebel that he withdraws his grace. God must withdraw his grace when that happens, because otherwise men would multiply evil. The more sinners are blessed, the more evil they create. They give him no glory, because the more evil they create the more they turn away from him and rebel. Give sinners more riches and they would just become more greedy and sinful. Give them more power and they become even more cruel and destructive.

## The outer man and the inner man

- **Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day** (Second Corinthians 4:16).

The outer man is our body of flesh. The inner man is our divine spirit. Once our body reaches its full maturity it gradually begins to perish through what we call the aging process. However, our divine spirit never perishes. And because it is our true identity, then Jesus could say, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age"** (John 8:51). Our divine spirit will not see death. We will simply transition to the heavenly world. We will never see death.

Sinners will experience the living death of hell, which is called the second death. As the book of Revelation says, **"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 second death of the lake of fire is a kind of eternal death, where the process of suffering lasts forever.

## Looking not at things seen

- **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).

Those are beautiful words of encouragement for us. For this world is a world of tribulation. Indeed, Jesus said about it, **"In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world"** (John 16:33). And Solomon said, **"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 1:13-14).

No man needs to be told how this world is filled with sorrow and pain. No man needs to be told how each of us experience many sorrows and many pains. And yet Paul said our lives here were a **“slight momentary affliction.”**

Relative to the incomprehensibly wonderful blessings of eternal life in heaven all our sorrows and pains are truly only a slight affliction. Relative to living for eternity in heaven all our sufferings are only momentary. Calling our lives in this world of tribulation and vanity a slight momentary affliction helps us understand how wonderful will be our lives in heaven with God and Christ.

During the last supper Jesus warned his apostles of the coming sorrows of his betrayal and crucifixion. To help encourage them, he gave the example of childbirth: **“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”** (John 16:21).

Jesus said his betrayal and crucifixion would be to them like the anguish of childbirth. However, the joy of his resurrection would blot out their memory of the anguish. In the same way the joys of heaven will blot out the memories of our sufferings in this world of tribulation.

Not only is our suffering in this life but a slight momentary affliction, but that affliction **“works for us an eternal weight of glory from extraordinariness to extraordinariness ... .”** Somehow our affliction works glory for us, an eternal weight of glory. Glory that is from extraordinariness to extraordinariness. That glory is both eternal and extraordinary. Since it was impossible for Paul to describe the details of that glory, he used the most superlative words he could to simply tell about it.

It is impossible to describe the details of that glory because **“we look not at things seen, but at things not seen.”** We can only see through the eye of faith, because our glory is in the invisible world of heaven. And that heavenly world is our true home, our eternal home.

The author of the book of Hebrews, after giving many examples of faith, he said, **“All these died in faith, not having taken the promises, but who saw and greeted them from afar, and who confessed that they were foreigners and sojourners on the earth. For those who say such things show that they are seeking a fatherland.**

**“And if indeed they remembered that from which they came out, they would have had time to return. But now they aspire for a superior one, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”** (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Paul also mentioned how the things we can see are only temporary. Not only is this world going to be destroyed, but even the material things of it are temporal because they are constantly changing. In great contrast, the invisible world of heaven is eternal. And that is what we see with the eyes of our faith. That is what we lift up our eyes and set them upon as we journey through this dark and sinful world of tribulation.

## We will have a building from God

- **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** (Second Corinthians 5:1).

In this world our spirits are housed in bodies of flesh, and those bodies are housed in buildings made by hands. Nevertheless, in whatever house our spirit dwells in this world, it will eventually be destroyed. Consequently, it is very encouraging to know that we have an eternal habitation in the heavens that is from God, and not made by hands.

During the last supper Jesus told his apostles that he was going to prepare a place for them in heaven: **“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 he is preparing a place for all who belong to him, one that is eternal in the heavens.

## Longing for our eternal habitation

- **For also in this we groan, longing to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked. For also those who are in the tent groan, being burdened, not in that we want to undress, but to clothe ourselves, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by the life** (Second Corinthians 5:2-4).

We groan in this earthly house of our tent—in our body of flesh—because we live in a world of tribulation, and the outer man of us (our flesh) is perishing. Therefore, we long **“to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven ... .”** For as long as we are in this earthly house of our tent we groan, being burdened.

Solomon told of the inescapable pains we experience in our flesh. **“For what has a man of all his labor, and of the striving of his heart in which he labors under the sun? For all his days are but sorrows, and his travail is grief, yea, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

Most of the time we repress those feelings, but they are always there in the background. That is the reason for the great popularity of liquors and narcotics. They numb the pains. Pleasures can also mask them, but pleasures are virtually always brief and fleeting.

By putting on our habitation from heaven we will not be found naked. Spirits need bodies, whether bodies of the earth or of heaven. Jesus told of the shame of nakedness: **“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). I speak much more about the nature of spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul also compared the change of our lives of groaning in this world, to the glorious one of heaven with being swallowed. Our mortal lives in this world of great tribulation will be completely swallowed up by the life, the eternal life of heaven where there is no sorrow and pain. We will be completely overwhelmed by life, an eternal life of joy and glory.

## God is for us

- **Now he who wrought us for this same thing is God, who also gave us the pledge of the Spirit** (Second Corinthians 5:5).

It was God who send his only begotten Son into the world to save our souls so that we could **“clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven.”** Only Jesus was able to redeem us from eternal condemnation with the devil and the demons and with all other sinners. Remember however, he is only able to redeem us when we believe in him, repent of our sins, and obey him. Therefore, only faithful disciples of Christ will be able to clothe themselves with our habitation from heaven.

Paul said that God also gave us the pledge of the Spirit. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles during 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 Holy Spirit in us is God’s pledge that we can clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven, and that he will adopt us to become his sons to live with him for eternity. Paul also spoke of that when he said to the Ephesians, **“In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is a pledge of our inheritance, for the redemption of the acquired possession, for appreciation of his glory”** (Ephesians 1:13-14).

The Holy Spirit in us is our guarantee of eternal salvation. Therefore, knowing the Holy Spirit is in us, through integrating the word of God in our hearts, and sensing his presence in our conscience, we become aware of the guarantee of God’s promise of our inheritance. For the Holy Spirit in us is God’s pledge.

Therefore, every time you think of God’s word, and use it, together with your conscience, to guide you to live right, that is a reminder of God’s promise to you. Because that Holy Spirit, that energizing force in our lives, is God’s pledge to us. Remember however, we are no longer given the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let no man deceive you. The energizing force of the Holy Spirit within us now always conforms to God’s laws of nature.

## We walk by faith, not by sight

- **Therefore always being confident, and knowing that while at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. And we are confident, and are pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be at home near the Lord** (Second Corinthians 5:6-8).

Paul twice mentioned being confident. We are confident in the promise that God has given us because we walk by faith, not by sight. We believe in God and we believe in his promises. We know, that while we are at home in this body of flesh we are absent from the

Lord. Paul said we know that; we know it because of our confidence in the Lord our God. We cannot see it, but we know it because we walk by faith, not by sight.

And that faith is not a blind faith, but an enlightened faith. For the evidence in support of God and his holy Bible is overwhelming. God cannot be denied by anyone who will think objectively and rationally about him. As psalmists have said, **“The fool has said in his heart, There is no God”** (Psalm 14:1 and 53:1). Fools do not think, they just live for their flesh like the beasts. The believers in evolution even themselves proclaim they are only beasts.

Likewise the divine authority of the Bible is obvious to anyone who reads it with an open mind. It is so filled with wisdom and truth it is obviously from God. It is so far superior to anything that man has ever written there is no comparison. The more a man studies and accepts the word of God, the more his faith becomes knowledge to him. It becomes knowledge because the evidence is so overwhelming.

Jesus never said he believed in God; he said he knew him. For example, he said to the Jews, **“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 8:54-55).

Paul said that although while we are at home in the body and are absent from the Lord, we are confident, and are pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be at home near the Lord. Our desire is to be freed from this vain body of flesh and be at home near our Savior Jesus Christ and God our heavenly Father.

Every faithful disciple of Christ has that desire. Nevertheless remember, the decision to be absent from the body is not ours to make. For as long as we are here in the world we can work to promote his good news among men. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples, **“I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night comes when no man can work”** (John 9:4). The night that comes is our absence from the body.

## Appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ

- **Therefore also we aspire, whether at home or away from home, to be well-pleasing to him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of the Christ, so that each man may receive back about the things that he did through the body, whether good or bad** (Second Corinthians 5:9-10).

Paul earlier spoke about being at home in the body, meaning our body of flesh. He also spoke about being at home near the Lord, meaning our eternal habitation in the heavens. Now he speaks of how we aspire to be well-pleasing to the Lord, whether at home or away from home.

Since he spoke of our two homes, the one of our flesh and the one in heaven near the Lord, then wherever we are, on the earth or in heaven, we aspire to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Whether we are at home in the flesh and away from the Lord, or whether we are away from the flesh and are at home with the Lord, we aspire to be well-pleasing to him. We will always want to please our Lord and Savior wherever we are.

We aspire to be well-pleasing to the Lord, not only because we love him, but because we must all appear before the judgment-seat of the Christ. For it is then that each man will **“receive back about the things he did through the body, whether good or bad.”**

Remember, John spoke of that in his great vision of the future in heaven: **“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. 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 20:11-13).

We are all going to receive back about the things we did through the body, whether good or bad. In this sinful world men often escape the justice of their deeds. But that only means the justice of their actions is postponed until the final judgment, because there justice is guaranteed. Remember what Jesus said about being judged: **“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).

## We persuade men

- **Having seen therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men** (Second Corinthians 5:11).

We can see the terror of the Lord’s wrath from the Bible record. There are numerous examples of how the terror of the Lord was inflicted upon sinners. God destroyed the entire antediluvian world with a flood, and he later destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from the sky. Those are just some early examples.

Therefore, having seen (through the Bible record) the terror of the Lord, we persuade men to repent and believe Jesus Christ. For only he can save us from the coming terror of the Lord. Although we do not persuade (convince) all men, we do persuade those who make themselves worthy of receiving salvation.

## Being manifested

- **But we have been manifested to God, and I hope also to have been manifested in your consciences** (Second Corinthians 5:11).

Paul said that he and his co-workmen had been manifested to God. That means they were recognized by God, recognized as being his servants. Although God sees and knows everything, he does not recognize or acknowledge all men. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“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 7:22-23).

As Paul and his co-workmen had been manifested to God, he hoped they would also be manifested in their consciences. Paul wanted the Corinthians to acknowledge in their consciences that he and his co-workmen were genuinely serving God. And we too need to recognize in our consciences men who are genuinely serving God.

However, we cannot recognize or acknowledge every man who makes that claim. Remember the men who had claimed they were serving the Lord, but he rejected them as having worked lawlessness. We need to authenticate men who are genuinely serving the Lord by using the Bible standard to judge their words and their deeds. As Jesus said about false prophets, **“From their fruits ye will know them”** (Matthew 7:16).

### Giving them an opportunity

- **For we are not commending ourselves again to you, but giving you an opportunity of boasting about us, so that ye may have for those who boast in appearance and not in heart** (Second Corinthians 5:12).

Paul had been teaching them many things, including what kind of men Paul and his co-workmen were and how they lived. For he said earlier to them, **“But we have renounced the covert things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor misrepresenting the word of God, but by the disclosure of the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God. ... For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves are your bondmen through Jesus”** (Second Corinthians 4:2-5).

However, Paul did not want the disciples at Corinth to think they were commending themselves again to them. When he was speaking about himself and his co-workmen, he was giving the brothers at Corinth an opportunity of boasting about them. Paul wanted those Corinthians to have something about him and his co-workmen they could boast about.

They needed that information **“for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.”** The world loves to boast in appearance and not in heart. Indeed, for them a man’s heart is irrelevant. The superficial things—how he looks and how he speaks, what he can do and what he possesses—are the only kinds of things they care about.

However, God values men differently. An example to illustrate that is given in the record about when Jehovah sent the prophet Samuel to anoint David to be king of Israel in place of Saul. It says, **“And it came to pass, when they came, that he [Samuel] looked on Eliab, and said, Surely Jehovah’s anointed is before him.”**

**“But Jehovah said to Samuel, Do not look on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For Jehovah sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks on the heart”** (First Samuel 16:6-7).

It is the character and spirit of a man that is important. And it is from those qualities that we are judged worthy to become sons of God for eternity or not.

### Whatever is our state of mind it is for you

- **For whether we are beside ourselves to God, or we are of normal mind, it is for you** (Second Corinthians 5:13).

Being beside yourself is like being out of your mind, which means being mad or crazy. And because Paul and his co-workmen were so zealous for the cause of Christ they appeared to be beside themselves to some people.

For example, when Paul was being tried before governor Festus and king Agrippa, the record says, **“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. But Paul says, I am not mad, eminent Festus, but I speak forth sayings of truth and soberness”** (Acts 26:24-25).

Jesus himself was sometimes accused of being mad. For the record says, **“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).

The record even tells one time when Jesus’ disciples said he was beside himself: **“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).

Therefore, being accused of being beside yourself sometimes simply means being excessively zealous, too much for your own good. Hence, Paul could have meant that whether they seemed excessively zealous for God, or were of a normal mind, it was for them. It was for their benefit. It was for their spiritual development and salvation.

## Christ died so that we would live for him

- **For the love of Christ holds us together, having judged this, that if one died for all, then all died. And he died for all so that those who live would no longer live to themselves, but to him who died for them, and was raised** (Second Corinthians 5:14-15).

The love of Christ—his love for us and our love for him—holds us together because he created a kingdom for us, the kingdom of the heavens. Without Christ and his kingdom we would have remained separated. But now through his great love for us and our love for him, we are united together in every nation throughout the world. And now each genuine disciple can call any other disciple his brother, his spiritual brother. And the psalmist said about that, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”** (Psalm 133:1).

Paul also spoke about having died. In fact he mentioned the word “died” four times in that short passage. He was primarily using that word in a figurative sense. What he meant by one dying for all was, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ. And his dying was both figurative and literal. It was figurative in the sense of how he forsook the pleasures and glories of this life. It was literal in that he was crucified on the cross.

Having mentioned how Christ died for all, all who believe and obey him, Paul said then all died. He meant that all for whom Christ died also died to their worldly lives, their lives of

sin. That dying is symbolized by our immersion in water (a figurative burial), which is followed by our rising up out of the water symbolizing our new life.

And our having died in that symbolic way begins our new lives of no longer living to ourselves. We no longer live selfishly to indulge in the pleasures of the world. But instead we live to him who died for us, to our Savior Jesus Christ. He died for our sakes not his. He died but he still lives because he was raised from the dead.

No man is a genuine disciple of Christ who has not died to his old life of sin. As Paul said to the Colossians, **“Think on the things above, not the things on the earth. For ye died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God. When the Christ, our life, is made known, then ye also will be made known with him in glory. Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry”** (Colossians 3:2-5).

We live in the world but we are not of the world. In Jesus’ prayer during the time of the last supper, he said, **“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 17:13-16).

We are not of the world because we died to the world. We live in the world, but we are not of the world. We are not a part of it because it is sinful and hostile to God.

## Knowing no man according to flesh

- **So that henceforth we know no man according to flesh, and even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know him no longer** (Second Corinthians 5:16).

What Paul meant by knowing no man according to flesh, means we do not evaluate and judge men according to their earthly lives. Remember, the word flesh can also mean not just our body but everything about our lives in the world. For example, Paul said later in this book, **“Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast”** (Second Corinthians 11:18). He then went on to describe many things about his life in the world, saying such things as, **“Are they Hebrews? I too. Are they Israelites? I too. Are they a seed of Abraham? I too. ...”** (Second Corinthians 11:22).

Paul is saying here that we no longer recognize a man according to his worldly life. Even for those who had known Jesus in the flesh, he is no longer recognized that way. His flesh was irrelevant. The worldly things, like how he looked, how he dressed, how he lived as a carpenter during the first thirty years of his life before his ministry, are not important.

That is why the Bible is silent about those things. It is silent because we do not need to know him according to flesh. And in the same way **“we know no man according to flesh.”** We now evaluate and judge, acknowledge and recognize men according to their spirit, not their flesh, not worldly things about them.

James gave an example of “knowing” men according to flesh, when he said, **“My brothers, ye should not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, in favoritism. For if a man with a gold ring in bright clothing comes into your synagogue, and also a poor man in dirty clothing comes in, and ye have regard for the man wearing the bright clothing, and say to him, Sit thou here well, and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit here below my footstool, then are ye not partial among yourselves, and become judges from evil thoughts?”** (James 2:1-4).

## In Christ all things are new

- **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 a new creation when we become a disciple of Christ. Our body does not change but our spirit does. Remember these words: **“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. 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 ...”** (Romans 6:3-8).

When we are immersed in water for the remission of our sins we become a new creation. However, we do not feel any different because our flesh has not changed. It is our spirit that is the new creation. Somehow God creates in us a new spirit, which change is completely insensible to us. He somehow takes our spirit that was defiled by sin, and transforms it into a new spirit of purity and holiness. Thus making us a new creation.

The old things of our defiled spirit have passed away, and all things about our spirit have become new. I suspect that in heaven we will be able to see how we became a new creation and all things about our spirit became new. But in this life we can only sense that change by our changed way of thinking and living. We have put on the new man in our hearts.

Paul spoke of that when he said, **“But now ye also, put off all these things: anger, wrath, wickedness, reviling, filthy speaking out of your mouth. Do not lie to each other, having stripped off the old man with his practices, and having put on the new man, being renewed in knowledge according to an image of him who created him ...”** (Colossians 3:8-10).

Nevertheless, that new man typically begins like a newborn babe in spirit. As Peter said, **“Therefore, having put off all maliciousness 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).

## God reconciled us to himself

- **And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation** (Second Corinthians 5:18).

God is the origin of all things. He created all things, and all things are from him. Of course, God did not originate evil. Evil is the result of disobedience to him. Remember, words like “all” and “forever” in the Bible do not have the same absolute meaning they have to us. Hence, although God created all things, he did not originate evil. He anticipated it, but does not create it. Let not scoffers deceive you about such terms.

God created in every man a pure spirit. For the spirit of every baby is pure in God’s sight. However, when we first sin against God, that alienates us from him. Our first sin was like the sin of Adam; it could not be undone. Sin permanently alienates us from God. And there was nothing we could do to reconcile ourselves to him. Our souls were permanently defiled.

It is only through the power of Christ to redeem us that we can be reconciled to God. For when he redeems us that makes us righteous before God; it washed away our sins and made our spirits pure and holy again. And as long as we remain a faithful disciple of Christ we can never again be alienated from God. We are destined to become his sons for eternity—if we remain faithful to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul said that Christ gave them the ministry of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is called evangelism. It is the effort to persuade sinners, those who are alienated from God, to repent and have faith in Christ—to believe and obey him. That is the only way we can ever be reconciled to God.

Christ first gave to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation. For he said to them after his resurrection, **“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). Remember, the word apostle means “he who is sent on a mission.” The apostles all perished in the first century, but the ministry of reconciliation continues through Christ’s disciples, whoever and wherever they may be.

## Committed the word 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** (Second Corinthians 5:19).

God is in us similar to how he was in Christ, although not with his powers. Remember, Paul said, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit of God was in Christ guiding him in his ministry to reconcile the world to God. And for those who become reconciled to God he does not impute their trespasses against them. We become reconciled to God through Christ, and our trespasses are not imputed against us because Christ redeemed us from that condemnation.

God committed to us the word of reconciliation. And that word of reconciliation is the good news of Christ. God committed to us, we who belong to Christ, the word of reconciliation, because we are now his priests. Remember what Peter said about that: **“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).

A priest is someone who acts as an intermediary for God, which is what we are now. And every man in the kingdom of the God is now a priest of God. And Christ is our high priest, as the author of Hebrews said: **“Because of which, holy brothers, companions of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation, Jesus Christ ...”** (Hebrews 3:1).

## Ambassadors on behalf of Christ

- **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 5:20).

The apostles were indeed ambassadors on behalf of Christ. They were personally chosen by him to be his representatives to the world. However, we too are ambassadors of Christ. Especially since the apostles have long since died. We continue their work as ambassadors of Christ. We cannot do all they did, because the apostles established Christ's church and developed its sacred scriptures. The idea of apostolic succession is a false doctrine created by aggressive men who want to control the church and promote themselves.

Nevertheless, we who are Christians continue the work of the apostles in the sense of being representatives or ambassadors on behalf of Christ. We are ambassadors to represent Christ to the world, appealing to them to accept the good news of Christ. As Paul said, it is as though God were calling through us. God does not speak to mankind directly. He speaks through his ambassadors, which were originally the prophets and the apostles but are now the disciples of Christ, being his priests for the world.

Through us God is calling the world to repentance. Therefore, we plead on behalf of Christ. We plead with the sinners of the world to repent and be reconciled to God. That plea comes from God himself. We are mere ambassadors presenting his plea for reconciliation. God wants all of us to be reconciled to him, all except unrepentant sinners.

God does not enjoy punishing sinners. For example, he said to the prophet Ezekiel: **“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).

Therefore, to all who are unrepentant sinners alienated from God: **“Be ye reconciled to God.”** Repent and turn from your evil ways, for why will ye die? Let not Satan deceive you. Unless you are reconciled to God you will die. Your spirit will suffer a living death in the lake of fire called hell.

## He knew no sin, but was made sin for us

- **For the man who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him** (Second Corinthians 5:21).

I once saw and heard on a recorded television program (via close caption) a well-known televangelist (now deceased) say that Jesus was the very worse sinner who ever lived. He did not say that to dishonor him. He said it because he was deceived about scriptures such as the one above.

It is commonly believed that Jesus was literally made a sinner so that he could redeem us. That is absolutely not true. He remained sinless all his life. As Paul said, Jesus **“knew no sin.”** Neither did God make him sin on our behalf. For God never violates justice—never!

Indeed, one of the laws that God gave through Moses, said, **“The fathers shall not be put to death for the sons, neither shall the sons be put to death for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin”** (Deuteronomy 24:16). And the psalmist said about God, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). How then could God have made his own beloved Son to be sin? He did not!

Jesus was made sin on our behalf by the wicked rulers of the Jews. They declared Jesus to be a criminal, worthy of death. They made him out to be sin, and they did it unjustly. They declared a sinless man to be an evil sinner. And that made them be among the very worse sinners who ever lived.

God allowed those wicked men to declare Jesus to be sin so that Jesus could redeem us and save our souls. That is how Jesus **“was made sin on our behalf.”** And he was made sin (unjustly condemned as a criminal) on our behalf **“so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”**

When Jesus redeemed us—we who belong to him—from the condemnation of our sins, that purified our souls and made us righteous. And that also made us become the righteousness of God in Christ. You see, when Jesus died upon the cross it was the climax of his life of perfect obedience to God. Therefore, in order for God to remain just, it was necessary for him to reward that perfect obedience. Justice required it. For non-rewarded obedience is as unjust as unpunished disobedience.

Therefore, Jesus was rewarded. And part of his reward was the right to redeem all who belong to him. Hence, by becoming disciples of Christ, being redeemed from condemnation, we became fulfillment of God’s justice for Christ. We became proof that God is always righteous and just. For it would not have been right for God to deny the redemption of all who belong to Christ. Moreover, Satan can no longer accuse us. Nor can Satan accuse God of being unjust by condemning him and not us.

A sinful people do not understand true justice, but the righteous love it. For Solomon said, **“It is joy to the righteous to do justice, but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity”** (Proverbs 21:15), and, **“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek Jehovah understand all things”** (Proverbs 28:5).

## Working jointly

- **And working jointly, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain** (Second Corinthians 6:1).

We work jointly as ambassadors on behalf of Christ. Each generation of disciples, genuine disciples, continues the same work of pleading on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God. And the message of that ministry of reconciliation, which was established by Jesus and his apostles, remains the same. The commands of Christ have not changed. They will always remain the same: yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Paul also urged us not to receive the grace of God in vain. Receiving the grace of God in vain means losing our salvation. And that happens when we become unfaithful to him, and become fruitless in his service. The author of Hebrews spoke of receiving the grace of God in vain, when he said, **“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord. Looking carefully lest any man fall short, away from the grace of God ...”** (Hebrews 12:14-15).

Remember how the Lord condemned the one talent man for not using his talent: **“And the man who received the one talent also having come, said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering from where thou didst not scatter. And after being afraid, having gone, I hid thy talent in the ground. Lo, thou hast thine own.**

**“But having answered, his lord said to him, Thou evil and lazy bondman, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather from where I did not scatter. Thou oughtest 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 25:24-30).

## An acceptable time

- **For he says, At an acceptable time I heard thee, and in a day of salvation I helped thee. Behold, now is an acceptable time. Behold, now is a day of salvation** (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Paul quoted a passage from the prophet Isaiah, which says, **“Thus says Jehovah, In an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in a day of salvation I have helped thee”** (Isaiah 49:8). God was speaking then to his people Israel. However, Paul applied those words to us, God’s new people.

The acceptable time when God hears us is when we repent and believe his Son Jesus Christ. The day of salvation is when we obey the Lord and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. That immersion is the symbolic burial of our old man of sin.

Paul spoke of that, when he said, **“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 6:4-5). And that newness of life is our soul’s salvation, salvation for eternal life.

The acceptable time and the day of salvation for any man is whenever he repents, believes, and obeys the Lord Christ. Hence, Paul could say **“Behold, now is an acceptable time. Behold, now is a day of salvation.”** In other words, the acceptable time and the day of salvation is anytime, anytime a man wants to be reconciled to God.

Nevertheless, that time will not last forever. For when our lives are over here upon the earth, there will no longer be an acceptable time or a day of salvation. As the writer of Hebrews said, **“For when we sin willfully after taking the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire, a fervor that is going to devour the opposition.**

**“Any man who has disregarded the law of Moses dies without mercies from two or three witnesses. By how much worse punishment do ye think he will deserve who has trampled the Son of God, and who considered profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who treated the Spirit of grace contemptuously? For we know him who said, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge his people.**

**“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:26-31).

## Commending ourselves as helpers of God

- **Giving not one cause of stumbling in anything, so that the ministry may not be criticized, but in everything commending ourselves as helpers of God ...** (Second Corinthians 6:3-4).

A cause of stumbling is when a disciple commits any kind of transgression or offense against God. That would give an unbeliever cause to doubt and reject the good news of Christ, and even malign it. That is especially true of those who actively evangelize, such as men like Paul and his co-workmen. Committing a transgression or an offense against God by those who are preaching and promoting the good news of Christ gives unbelievers cause to criticize the ministry. Therefore, we must always be on guard against any cause of stumbling.

An example of giving the enemies of God an excuse to blaspheme is the case of how David sinned against Uriah. David first committed adultery with Uriah’s wife (making her pregnant), then, trying to hid his sin, David caused Uriah to be slain in battle. God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke David, and reveal how he would be punished.

Here is part of that story: **“And David said to Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah. And Nathan said to David, Jehovah also has put away thy sin; thou shall not die. However, because by this deed thou have given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, the child also that is born to thee [the result of his sin with the wife of Uriah] shall surely die”** (Second Samuel 12:13-14). The enemies of Jehovah could

blaspheme because David had been such a hypocrite about that sin. He claimed to love God, but committed adultery, and then tried to conceal it with the murder of a righteous man.

Instead of giving a cause of stumbling as David did, we must commend ourselves in everything as helpers of God, not offenders of him. By our faith in Jesus Christ and our obedient to him we commend ourselves as being righteous before God. We commend ourselves and bear good fruit for him. We commend ourselves as helping God promote truth and righteousness in the world. And that gives us credibility for the ministry.

## In every situation

- **... in much perseverance, in afflictions, in necessities, in restrictions, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hungerings, in purity, in knowledge, in forbearance, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in non-hypocritical love, in word of truth, in power of God, through the weapons of righteousness of the right hand and of the left. Through glory and disrepute, through slander and commendation ...**  
(Second Corinthians 6:4-8).

We especially commend ourselves as helpers of God when we remain faithful to him even while suffering the trials and tribulations of this life. Unlike unbelievers our suffering does not turn us away from God. It does not cause us to blame him and rail against him when we suffer. On the contrary, suffering draws us closer to him. As a hurt child clings to his mother, so we cling to our heavenly Father when we hurt.

Paul named some of the kinds of sufferings that he and his co-workmen had endured. That list will help you understand how much they had to endure. That can also help you endure whatever suffering comes upon you in your life.

Paul said they were helpers of God in

much perseverance  
afflictions  
necessities  
restrictions  
stripes  
imprisonments  
tumults  
labors  
sleeplessness  
hungering

Much perseverance means struggling to continue laboring as helpers of God. We all know how much productive labor is a struggle, and how easy it is to quit. Affliction is a general term that refers to whatever causes sufferings. And Paul and his co-workmen had many causes of sufferings.

Necessities refers to being without the things we all need, like food and shelter. Restrictions involve things that preventing us from performing. And as everyone knows being

restricted can evoke much frustration. The sinners of this generation are adding more and more restrictions to what we as Christians can say and do.

Stripes refer to whippings. Paul suffered whippings from both Gentiles and Jews. He also suffered many imprisonments. The book of Acts describes many of them. The tumults they experienced included riots against them as well as earthquakes and storms. Paul's labors were of many kinds, and the suffering of fatigue is the natural consequence of labor.

Part of the necessities they suffered were sleeplessness and hungerings. Many of the other sufferings they experienced caused them sleeplessness and food deprivation. For example, Acts describes how Paul was on a ship in a violent storm that lasted two weeks. The storm was so severe that the passengers on the ship ate nothing for those two weeks.

The record tells what Paul said to those on board: **“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.**

**“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”** (Acts 27:33-37).

After Paul listed those many negative things they suffered as helpers of God, he listed several things about themselves. They commended themselves as helpers of God in

- purity
- knowledge
- forbearance
- kindness
- the Holy Spirit
- non-hypocritical love
- word of truth
- power of God

Spiritual purity is a characteristic of every genuine helper of God. There is nothing dirty or perverted about the lives of faithful disciples of Christ. For we have chosen the ways of the purity and holiness of God. God has also blessed us with special knowledge. Knowledge about him and his will for us, which we share freely. We also follow God by our forbearance and kindness toward others.

We also commend ourselves as helpers of God in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps our greatest blessing here upon the earth, is to have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us. That great guiding spiritual force involves both our feelings and our intellect. And the evidence of that, which is seen in the way we live, commends us as true helpers of God. For that spiritual force helps us promote truth and righteousness in the world.

We also have non-hypocritical love. Our love is genuine and can be trusted, which is unlike the way of sinners. We also commend ourselves as helpers of God in word of truth. As our love is genuine so also are our words and teachings. For they come from the Holy Bible, which is the word of God. They are not our words. They are not words from any other man. They are the inspired words of God. Therefore, they are words of truth.

When Paul said they commended themselves as helpers of God in power of God, he was probably referring to the special gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given when the church was first beginning. Those supernatural powers were evidence that the good news of Christ was truly from God. Remember however, we no longer need that kind of evidence now that the New Testament is available.

Paul and his co-workmen also commended themselves as helpers of God through  
 the weapons of righteousness of the right hand and of the left  
 glory and disrepute  
 slander and commendation

Weapons are used for combat, but our warfare is spiritual. For Paul said, **“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 6:11-12). Our greatest weapon in that warfare is the Holy Bible. For when Paul was describing the armor of God, he also said, **“And take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...”** (Ephesians 6:17).

However, we also have other weapons of righteousness. Whatever is used to defeat sin and deceit is a weapon of righteousness. Our faith in Christ and his good news of salvation helps defeat sin and error. The many good things we do help defeat sin and error. Weapons of righteousness of the right hand and of the left are everything that can be used to combat sin and error.

Paul and his co-workmen also commended themselves as helpers of God through glory and disrepute, slander and commendation. Whether they received glory and commendation for all the good they did, or whether they were in disrepute and slandered by their enemies, they continued to commend themselves as helpers of God. There is one thing you can be sure, regardless of how much we are slandered, and how disreputable we are made, the truth about us will always eventually be known. And we will be revealed as genuine helpers of God.

### As failing yet succeeding

- **... as deceitful, and yet true; as unknown, and well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and not put to death; as grieving, but always rejoicing; as poor, but making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things** (Second Corinthians 6:8-10).

Paul and his co-workmen also commended themselves as helpers of God as  
 deceitful, and yet true  
 unknown, and well known  
 dying, and behold, we live  
 punished, and not put to death  
 grieving, but always rejoicing  
 poor, but making many rich

having nothing, and yet possessing all things

The world saw Paul and his co-workmen as deceitful, yet they were genuine helpers of God proclaiming the truth. They were seen as obscure and unknown men, but they were well known to God and they later became world famous. They were seen as a perishing group that was dying out, but they continued to live. They were seen as men who were frequently punished, yet they were never put to death. They were not put to death in the sense that the church continued to survive and grow.

The world saw them as grieving, yet they always rejoiced. Remember this passage about the apostles: **“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. 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). Even when beaten, they rejoiced.

The world saw them as poor men, but with their preaching the good news of Christ they made many rich because they brought eternal life to them, which is worth more than all riches. The world saw them as having nothing, and yet they possessed all things. Remember this passage: **“Therefore let not one man boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s”** (First Corinthians 3:21-23).

And the things about Paul and his co-workmen apply to all who commend themselves as helpers of God.

## Opened mouth and enlarged heart

- **O Corinthians, our mouth has been opened to you, our heart has been enlarged. Ye are not limited in us, but ye are limited in your bowels** (Second Corinthians 6:11-12).

Paul is here appealing for them to establish a closer relationship with him and his co-workmen. And he used the words mouth and heart figuratively. When he said their mouths had been opened to them, he meant they shared all of their thoughts with them. Paul and his co-workmen concealed nothing from them.

When Paul spoke of their heart, he was referring to their feelings. When he said their heart had been enlarged, he meant they had enlarged their affection for them. Their love and longing for them increased. Therefore, the Corinthians were not limited in Paul and his co-workmen. They were limited in their own emotions, their innermost feelings, which Paul symbolized as their bowels.

It is prudent to be restrained toward others that have not proven themselves worthy of having a close relationship with you. Because the more open we are to persons the more vulnerable we are to being hurt by them. Paul was assuring them they had no reason to be restrained toward him and his co-workmen. They were not limited in Paul and his co-workmen, because they had proven themselves trustworthy. The Corinthians were limited by their own overly restrained feelings.

## Be ye enlarged

- **But I speak the same recompense as to children, be ye also enlarged** (Second Corinthians 6:13).

It is good and right and proper for our children to love us as we love them. Therefore, we expect them to recompense our love, and love us in return. What righteous father or mother does not grieve when their children do not recompense their love for them? Every righteous father and mother enlarges their hearts for their children. We love them deeply, and we want them to love us deeply. That is the kind of healthy relationship God wants for us as members of his kingdom.

Paul used that example as the kind of healthy relationship God wants all who belong to him to have with each other. Therefore, Paul pleaded with the Christians at Corinth to recompense him and his co-workmen with the same kind of love and affection they had for them.

## Become not unequally yoked

- **Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness? And what agreement has Christ with Belial? Or what share have believers with non-believers? And what mutual agreement has a temple of God with idols?** (Second Corinthians 6:14-16).

Becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers means any kind of association or relationship where our faith would be denied or our obedience to Christ would be violated. Paul asked five questions to emphasize how wrong that would be. He asked,

What partnership has righteousness and lawlessness?

What fellowship has light with darkness?

What agreement has Christ with Belial [Satan]?

What share have believers with non-believers?

What mutual agreement has a temple of God with idols?

An example of becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers would be working somewhere that involves promoting sinful behavior, such in a casino or a night club. Another example would be for a Christian to marry an atheist. And modern organizations such as the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews are clearly an unequal yoke with unbelievers, which deserves our condemnation. Incidentally, that organization was created by a Jew who denies Jesus was Christ the Son of God.

## Our God and Father

- **For ye are a temple of the living God, just as God said, I will dwell in them, and will walk among them. And I will be their God, and they will be a people to me. Therefore, Come ye out from among them, and be ye separated, says the Lord, And touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you**

**and will be for a Father to you, and ye will be for sons and daughters to me, says Lord Almighty** (Second Corinthians 6:16-18).

That passage quotes several things that God said about himself and his people. Most were quotations from other passages in the Bible: one from the New Testament and four from the Old Testament, all of which I list below:

**Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

(First Corinthians 3:16).

**And I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will be their God** (Exodus 29:45).

**And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people**

(Leviticus 26:12).

**And I will be their God, and they shall be my people** (Jeremiah 31:33).

**Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from there. Touch no unclean thing** (Isaiah 52:11).

However, regarding the words about sons and daughters, there is no other place in Bible where God said he will be a Father to us and we will be for sons and daughters to him. Nevertheless, Paul did not say he was quoting the words from another source. God is saying those words here through Paul.

Incidentally, in the Bible there are two hundred and sixty-eight references to God as a Father, but only seven of them are in the Old Testament. God was rarely called a Father before Christ came. It was Jesus who emphasized that God was a Father to us.

God wants us to be his people. More than that, he wants us to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him. We become his people and his sons and daughters when we believe in his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them. When that happens, the Holy Spirit of God is made to dwell in us, which then makes us a temple of God (collectively). I explain more fully how that process occurs in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Let us cleanse ourselves

- **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).

The things Paul listed in the previous passage are truly great and wonderful promises from God. He promised that

he will dwell in us

he will walk among us

he will be our God

we will be his people

he will receive us

he will be a Father to us

we will be for sons and daughters to him.

What could be more wonderful than those things? Therefore, we must **“cleanse ourselves from every filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in fear of God”** if we want

to receive those promises. We must prove ourselves worthy of becoming his sons for eternity. We must purge ourselves of every sin, and perfect holiness in us. Our lives here upon the earth are a continual battle against things that make us filthy, not only filthiness of the flesh but more importantly filthiness of the spirit.

And every time we sin it defiles our spirit and makes it filthy. And we cannot be holy if our spirit is filthy. Therefore, we must continually cleanse ourselves of every sin, and perfect holiness in us. It is a lifelong process, because our flesh continually tries to defile our spirit.

Paul spoke of that, when he 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).

And we must also live that way in fear of God, because he expects us to fear him. Remember these words of Solomon: **“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). And Peter said, **“Respect all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Respect the king”** (First Peter 2:17).

Woe to the man who does not fear God. For in his great vision of heaven, John said, **“And I saw an agent flying in mid-heaven having eternal good news to proclaim to those who sit on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying in a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. And worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and springs of waters”** (Revelation 14:6-7). The passage then describes God’s wrath against sinners.

## Make room for us

- **Make room for us. We wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we exploited no man. I speak not for condemnation, for I have said before that ye are in our hearts to die together and to live together** (Second Corinthians 7:2-3).

Paul had earlier told them that he and his co-workmen had enlarged their hearts to them. And he pleaded for them to enlarge their hearts to Paul and his co-workmen. And now by asking to make room for them he was continuing that plea. He was asking the Corinthian Christians to make room for Paul and his co-workmen in their hearts.

To help the disciples enlarge their hearts and make room for Paul and his co-workmen, he told how honorably they had lived among them and treated them. They had no reason to be cautious and restrained in their feelings. Paul and his co-workmen had neither wronged any man, nor corrupted any man, nor exploited any man. And he could make that claim not only for the disciples at Corinth, but for anyone else. Paul and his co-workmen had proven themselves to be honorable men, worthy of being in their hearts.

Paul then assured the Corinthian disciples he was not condemning them. He was simply urging them to make room for Paul and his co-workmen in their hearts. He wanted a closer

relationship with them, the kind that loving brothers ought to have. And he reminded the brothers at Corinth how he and his co-workmen had opened their hearts to them. They were in their hearts to the extent of dying together and living together.

His expression about having them in their hearts to die together and to live together is symbolic wording for the unity and depth of feelings Paul and his co-workmen had about them. Remember how he compared our unity with the unity of the parts of our body: **“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 12:27). Hence, we should all have each other in our hearts to die together and to live together.

### Great is Paul’s pride for them

- **Great is my boldness toward you, great is my pride for you. I have been filled with encouragement. I over-abound with joy in all our affliction** (Second Corinthians 7:4).

Paul’s affection for his Christian brothers at Corinth was very great. And he wanted them to know it, because he had written many strong criticisms and rebukes to them in his first letter. Since Paul’s heart had been enlarged for them he could have great boldness toward them. He could express himself to them in ways that he could not with strangers.

He expressed his great pride for them. They had responded to his criticisms and rebukes properly. Instead of becoming angry, resentful, and combative, they humbled themselves and repented. It takes strength of character to respond that way. The disciples at Corinth had so proven themselves that Paul was filled with encouragement and over-abounding joy. They proved they were genuine disciples of Christ. Therefore, Paul had great pride for them.

He also over-abounded with joy because he was so relieved about them. Nobody likes to rebuke those they love. Not only does it cause them pain, but there is also the risk of damaging the relationship with them. Remember how Paul told of his concern about that: **“For out of much stress and dismay of heart, through many tears, I wrote to you, not that ye would be grieved, but that ye might know the love that I have so much more for you”** (Second Corinthians 2:4).

His great love for them and his dismay of heart about having to rebuke them, cause him to be filled with encouragement and over-abounding joy when they responded positively—even in all the afflictions he and his co-workmen were suffering.

Dear reader, if you ever deserve punishment, prove your strength of character by humbling yourself and accepting whatever you are given. That kind of response will give encouragement and joy to those who have the burden of applying the punishment. For no righteous soul enjoys having to punish those he loves. And that is also true of God himself.

## All their affliction

- **I over-abound with joy in all our affliction. For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had not one relief, but being oppressed in everything: battles outside, fears within** (Second Corinthians 7:4-5).

Paul also spoke of the afflictions he and his co-workmen were suffering. He said their flesh had not one relief, being oppressed in everything. Remember what he said at the beginning of this book: **“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”** (Second Corinthians 1:8).

And later in this book he described in detail the kind of things they suffered. Here is what he said about the many perils they faced: **“... in perils of flowing waters, in perils of bandits, in perils from my race, in perils from Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils at sea, in perils among false brothers ...”** (Second Corinthians 11:26).

Not only were they engaged in battles on the outside of them, but they suffered from fears within them. Considering all the perils they faced it is understandable why they suffered no rest because of their inner fears. It is virtually impossible not to fear when your life is in so much peril. Courageous men overcome their fears and persevere, but cowards are overcome by their fears.

Regarding Macedonia, remember what Paul said earlier in this book: **“Now having come to Troas for the good news of the Christ, and a door having been opened to me in the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, my not finding Titus my brother. But having departed from them, I went forth into Macedonia”** (Second Corinthians 2:12-13).

## Paul rejoiced at the arrival of Titus

- **Nevertheless God, who encourages the lowly, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. And not only by his presence, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged by you, reporting to us your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more** (Second Corinthians 7:6-7).

Even though their flesh had not one relief, Paul said they were encouraged by the arrival of Titus. Titus had apparently gone to Corinth to see how the congregation there was faring. Then he departed and met with Paul in Macedonia, where he gave him a good report about the disciples at Corinth. Therefore, Paul was not only encouraged by the arrival of Titus, which gave rest to Paul's spirit, but he was encouraged by the good report that Titus brought. The condition of the congregation at Corinth had encouraged Titus, and he in turn encouraged Paul and his other co-workmen.

Titus had reported to Paul their earnest desire, their mourning, and their zeal for him. Their earnest desire was no doubt to be fully obedient to the Lord. Their mourning was obviously caused by the rebukes that Paul had given them in his first letter. They also had

zeal for Paul. He had spent much time with them promoting Christ and his good news of salvation. They knew him well, and no doubt had much gratitude and affection for him. Moreover, they were not offended by his rebukes. Remember what Solomon said: **“He who rebukes a man shall afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue”** (Proverbs 28:23). Therefore, Paul rejoiced the more.

Notice also how Paul gave God the credit for their encouragement. Indeed, he said that God encourages the lowly, meaning the righteous souls of the world who are of low degree and have humble hearts. God always finds ways to encourage them. Therefore, if you are of low degree in the world, be humble, and trust and obey God, because he will encourage you one way or another.

### Regret but no regret

- **Because even though I grieved you in the letter, I do not regret (even though I did regret), for I perceive that that letter grieved you, even though for an hour** (Second Corinthians 7:8).

Paul did not regret grieving them in the letter because his criticisms and rebukes caused them to repent. And repenting from sin is absolutely necessary for eternal salvation. How then could Paul regret doing whatever he could to cause them to repent?

When Paul said he did regret, he meant he regretted the need to rebuke them. He did not regret rebuking them; he regretted the necessity of it. To regret is to feel sad and sorrowful. And Paul did indeed feel sad and sorrowful about the need to rebuke them.

Remember what he said about how he felt when he rebuked them: **“For out of much stress and dismay of heart, through many tears, I wrote to you, not that ye would be grieved, but that ye might know the love that I have so much more for you”** (Second Corinthians 2:4). He did not regret what he wrote; he regretted the necessity of it. He did not want to grieve them, but he was not sorry he had.

When Paul said he did not regret grieving them in the letter, he said it was because the letter grieved them. What he means is that the letter did not anger them, or make them bitter, or make them turn against him. Instead it grieved them, and that caused them to repent.

Notice how Paul said they were grieved for an hour. That is obviously a figure of speech symbolizing a short time. Thus, the Corinthian disciples were only grieved for a short time. Their grief was short lived because they took immediate action to repent and amend what needed fixing.

### Sorrow toward God

- **Now I rejoice, not that ye were grieved, but that ye were grieved for repentance. For ye were grieved toward God, so that ye might suffer loss from us in nothing. For sorrow toward God works repentance for salvation without regret, but the sorrow of the world works death** (Second Corinthians 7:9-10).

Paul rejoiced when he heard of their response. He did not rejoice because they were grieved. He rejoiced because they were grieved for repentance. They were grieved toward God, which means they were troubled about their relationship with God. And that kind of sorrow works repentance, which then works for salvation, eternal salvation.

That also meant they suffered no loss from Paul and his co-workmen. The Corinthian disciples could have lost the affection and spiritual support they were receiving from Paul and his co-workmen. Indeed, if their grieving had produced anger, bitterness, and a hostile reaction, that would have caused them great loss with Paul and his co-workmen. But their grieving toward God caused them to lose nothing.

Paul also contrasted sorrow toward God with the sorrow of the world. Sorrow toward God works repentance, and there are no regrets about that kind of sorrow because repentance is for salvation. In contrast, the sorrow of the world works death. For there is nothing good about the sorrow of the world. It is like defeat. It depresses the spirit and interferes with living. That is why the world does things like “drowning their sorrows with strong drink.” And strong drink is a deadly poison to their minds that has produced immeasurable destruction and death.

### The eagerness it worked in them

- **For behold this same thing—your grieving toward God. How much eagerness it worked in you, even a defense, even indignation, even fear, even longing, even zeal, even vengeance! In everything ye demonstrated yourselves to be pure in the matter (Second Corinthians 7:11).**

Paul was delighted with how much eagerness their grieving toward God had worked in them. And he listed six specific things about that eagerness, saying it worked in them

even a defense  
 even indignation  
 even fear  
 even longing  
 even zeal  
 even vengeance

They produced a defense in order to protect their relationship with God, which had been threatened by the things Paul criticized. And that defense was repentance. They produced indignation about the things they were doing wrong, and no longer tolerated them. Fear was produced in them because they could see how much damage the wrongs were doing to them, and how much they could suffer from them.

They produced longing in their souls to reestablish themselves as righteous men who were faithful and obedient to God. They aroused zeal in themselves to amend everything that was needed, and do it without delay. And they expressed vengeance to administer justice toward those who were guilty of causing those sorrows.

Paul was fully convinced they had demonstrated themselves to be pure in the matter. Their repentance had resulted in the removal of their guilt and made them pure. Their repentance removed their guilt because as disciples of Christ we are forgiven when we repent toward God. Notice, how their repentance was not merely feeling sorry or grieving. It was the

actions they had taken to amend the wrongs to make them pure in the matter. Those many eager actions demonstrated they had genuinely repented. They did works worthy of repentance (see Acts 26:20). For repentance without making amends is a vain repentance.

## Paul wrote to reveal their eagerness

- **And so then, although I wrote to you, it was not because of the man who did wrong, nor because of the man who was wronged, but in order to reveal to you your eagerness for us in the sight of God** (Second Corinthians 7:12).

Paul's reference to the man who did the wrong was obviously about the man who had his father's wife, and the man who was wronged was the man's father. Remember, Paul had commanded the brothers at Corinth to punish the guilty man: **"For I truly, as being absent in the body but present in the spirit, I have already, as though present, judged the man who committed this thing this way. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a man to Satan for destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"** (First Corinthians 5:3-5).

However, Paul is saying here in his second letter that what he wrote to them was also a kind of trial. He did not write only because of those particular two men. He wrote in order to reveal to them their eagerness for Paul and his co-workmen in the sight of God. You see, Paul could not possibly micro-manage all of the affairs of that congregation. He could not possibly give them specific commands about each member who was guilty of something.

He wrote about that situation, not because of those specific men, but to give an occasion for his Christian brothers at Corinth to see for themselves how much eagerness they had for Paul and his co-workmen, eagerness for them in the sight of God. The Corinthians were eager for Paul and his co-workmen because they were ambassadors for Christ. The disciples at Corinth were eager for them because in the sight of God, Paul and his co-workmen were representing God.

Sometimes when we do not do things for someone because there are no opportunities we wonder how much we really care about them. Paul's command about the man who did the wrong was to give his brothers at Corinth an opportunity. It gave them an opportunity to reveal to themselves their eagerness for Paul and his co-workmen as ambassadors for Christ.

## Our boast to Titus about you

- **Because of this we have been encouraged. And from your encouragement, we rejoiced to a greater degree more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all** (Second Corinthians 7:13).

Because of the response of the brothers at Corinth to Paul's letter—their sorrow toward God and their eagerness to repent—Paul and his co-workmen had been encouraged. And because of that encouragement, Paul and his co-workmen rejoiced even more at the joy of Titus. Titus was joyful because his spirit had been refreshed by the brothers at Corinth.

The unity and closeness of spirit of all genuine disciples of Christ means we share our feelings. Remember, Paul said we are parts of the body of Christ, **“And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer together, or one part is honored, all the parts rejoice together”** (First Corinthians 12:26). Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen rejoiced at the joy of Titus, whose spirit had been refreshed by the congregation at Corinth.

Remember, Paul earlier did not know where Titus had been: **“Now having come to Troas for the good news of the Christ, and a door having been opened to me in the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, my not finding Titus my brother. But having departed from them, I went forth into Macedonia”** (Second Corinthians 2:12-13).

And apparently the later arrival of Titus at Macedonia was a surprise to Paul. For he said, **“For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had not one relief, but being oppressed in everything: battles outside, fears within. Nevertheless God, who encourages the lowly, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. And not only by his presence, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged by you, reporting to us your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more”** (Second Corinthians 7:5-7).

No reason is given why Titus had been at Corinth. It was obvious Paul had not sent him. Also there is also no reason given why Titus went to Macedonia. Perhaps he heard that Paul was there and had been looking for him. Remember, Corinth was in Achaia and Macedonia was just north of there.

### Paul's boast about them

- **Because, if I have boasted anything to him about you, I am not ashamed, but as we spoke all things in truth to you, so also our boast to Titus became truth** (Second Corinthians 7:14).

Paul here spoke of having boasted about the brothers at Corinth. And he was not ashamed of his boasting, because his boasting to Titus proved justified. Titus was not the only one Paul had boasted to. He spoke later in this book about his boasting to others about the brothers at Corinth.

Notice how Paul also said they spoke all things in truth to the disciples. Paul with the other apostles and their co-workmen always spoke all things in truth, especially all things about the good news of Christ and the word of God. However, there is always some risk when boasting about people, because we have free will and people are not always completely predictable.

If the brothers at Corinth had not repented and acted with eagerness to make amends, then Paul could have been ashamed of having boasted about them. But Paul was not ashamed. What Paul boasted to Titus about the Christians at Corinth proved to be fully justified.

### How Titus was received by them

- **And his bowels are more abundant toward you, remembering the obedience of you all, how ye received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything** (Second Corinthians 7:15-16).

Remember, as our heart symbolizes our innermost mind, so our bowels symbolize our innermost feelings and emotions. And the innermost feelings and emotions of Titus were more abundant toward the brothers at Corinth because he remembered the obedience of them all, and how they received him with fear and trembling. Therefore, Paul could say to them that he rejoiced that he had confidence in them in everything. They had proven themselves to be faithful disciples of Christ by their repentance and obedience.

Their reception of Titus with fear and trembling was not because of their fear of Titus himself. They received him with fear and trembling because they had read Paul's letter that had many criticisms against them. Moreover, they knew that Titus was a co-workman with Paul as representatives of Christ. Their reception of Titus with fear and trembling was another indication of their humbleness, their strength of character, and their faith in God. Arrogant men and scoffers have no fear of God.

### The generosity of some congregations

- **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).

Paul now begins speaking to them about generosity. He first mentions the grace of God that had been given in the congregations of Macedonia. Remember, Paul was in Macedonia when he wrote this letter to them. Macedonia was a Roman province, and there were several congregations in it. The most familiar of them to us were Thessalonica and Philippi because Paul wrote two letters to Thessalonica and one letter to Philippi that are recorded in the New Testament.

God's grace had been given in the congregations of Macedonia through their great generosity. The congregations there were not only very generous, but they were very eager to give, and were very sacrificial about it.

Paul mentioned how they gave in a great trial of affliction, and even from the depth of their poverty. However, Paul did not elaborate about those things. He did not say what kinds of afflictions they were suffering. Nor did he give any details about the depth of their poverty. He did not elaborate because information about specific afflictions and particulars about poverty are irrelevant to his message.

Even with those trials and handicaps Paul said they "**abounded for the wealth of their generosity ...**" They not only gave according to their ability, but beyond their ability. That probably means they gave more than they could afford. Remember the widow who gave all her living: "**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). The congregations of Macedonia probably sacrificed much of what they needed for their living expenses.

Not only that, but they gave willingly. Indeed, they gave with much exhortation, begging of them the favor to donate. Perhaps some others there tried to discourage them from giving so much, and that prompted them to beg for the favor of donating. Notice how they even said it was a favor to them. They considered it a privilege to share the fellowship of service for the sanctified by their generosity. Hence, they used much exhortation for their gifts to be accepted.

Paul mentioned the depth of their poverty, but he also spoke of their abundance and wealth, when he said, **“the abundance of their joy ... abounded for the wealth of their generosity ... .”** They were poor in material things but they were very rich in the quality of their spirit. They were rich in their love for the Lord and for their fellow Christians. For Paul said that service was for the sanctified, those who belonged to Christ.

That report about the generosity of the congregations of Macedonia is a marvelous testimony about the wonderful kind of spirit those early Christians had for each other. They truly had the spirit of Christ in them, demonstrating their love for each other with their great generosity in times of need.

Later in this book Paul gives instructions about collections to be made for the sanctified in Jerusalem. That is probably what Paul meant by the fellowship of service for the sanctified.

## First giving themselves

- **And it was not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us through the will of God, for us to urge Titus that, as he earlier began this kindness, so he would even finish it for you also** (Second Corinthians 8:5-6).

The way the congregations in Macedonia contributed to the service for the sanctified was not as Paul and his co-workmen expected. However, what they expected about their donations is not explained. Perhaps it was the eagerness and the magnitude of their generosity that was so unexpected.

Whatever it was, Paul said they first gave themselves to the Lord and to them through the will of God. That probably refers to their complete obedience: their obedience to the Lord, and their obedience to Paul and his co-workmen through the will of God. They gave themselves to Paul and his co-workmen, but only through the will of God.

They did not give themselves to Paul and his co-workmen as autocratic rulers (like the Catholic and Protestant Bishops), but as ambassadors for Christ. Remember what Paul said about not lording over their faith: **“Not because we lord over your faith, but are co-workmen of your joy, for by faith ye stand”** (Second Corinthians 1:24).

First giving themselves to the Lord, and to Paul and his co-workmen meant submitting themselves to obey them. That would explain why the disciples there used much exhortation, begging to contribute to the fellowship of service for the sanctified. He who gives himself to someone else must submit to their will, and ask for favors, not give orders or demand favors.

Perhaps their complete submission and eagerness to contribute explains why Paul and his co-workmen urged Titus to finish that work for the Corinthian brothers also. Paul said that Titus had earlier begun that kindness, that service for the sanctified. That suggests Titus had initiated the work of collecting contributions for the sanctified at Jerusalem, which would certainly have been an act of kindness toward the disciples there.

And now that the congregations in Macedonia had shown such eagerness to contribute, Titus needed to return to Corinth to finish the collections from the congregation there. Titus may even have carried this second letter to them upon his return.

### May ye also abound in this kindness

- **But as ye abound in everything, in faith, and word, and knowledge, and all diligence, and in your love to us, so that ye may also abound in this kindness. I speak not from commandment, but because of the zeal of others, also examining the genuineness of your love** (Second Corinthians 8:7-8).

Paul complimented the disciples at Corinth for abounding in everything. And he named five things about which they abounded:

in faith  
in word  
in knowledge  
in all diligence,  
in their love to them

The Corinthian disciples abounded in their faith in Christ and his good news of salvation. What Paul probably meant by abounding in word was their skill with language, perhaps both spoken and written.

When Paul said they abounded in knowledge he was no doubt referring to their knowledge of the word of God, which is the foundation of all knowledge. He said they abounded in all diligence. They had certainly demonstrated their diligence to repent and amend the things Paul had criticized. They also demonstrated their love for Paul and his co-workmen by their response to his first letter and to how they received Titus when he came to them.

Paul then asked them to **“also abound in this kindness,”** meaning the collection for the sanctified in Jerusalem. He said he was not commanding them. The good news of Christ is not like the law of Moses, which commanded tithing. Nowhere are we commanded to give any specific amount for any specific purpose. God has given us the liberty to decide for ourselves about our generosity.

Paul said he was asking them to abound in that kindness because of the zeal of others. And the congregations in Macedonia were certainly full of zeal for that work. Paul also said it would examine the genuineness of their love. It was another test for them, because how they joined the fellowship of service for the sanctified with their contribution would show how genuine was their love for God and his people.

And how we share what we have with our fellow Christians (who are in need) helps reveal how genuine is our love for God and his people, the disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God has many ways to test us, and that is one of them.

## Christ became poor so they could be rich

- **For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich he became poor for your sakes, so that by that man's poverty ye might become rich** (Second Corinthians 8:9).

Paul mentioned our Lord Jesus Christ as a prime example of sacrificial giving. He was indeed very rich, living in heaven as the only begotten Son of God. He had everything. Nevertheless, because of his wonderful grace he became poor for our sakes. He left everything to come into this world. He became the son of poor parents in a poor country. And he remained a poor man all his life, although the things he did could have made him very rich. He did many mighty works and healed countless people. Yet he never ask for, nor did he receive any monetary compensation. Such was his great generosity.

He lived in poverty that way so that we might become rich. His way of life here upon the earth was in full obedience to the will of his Father in heaven. And his complete obedience to God, even submitting to a cruel death on the cross, earned for him the right to redeem us—all who belong to him—from the condemnation of our sins and give us the opportunity to become sons of God for eternity in heaven, where we will be exceedingly rich with him. There is no greater example of generosity motivated by pure love.

However, God does not expect us to live in poverty the way our Lord did, any more than he wants us to submit to death by crucifixion. We do not have the powers he had. He was able to give much even in his poverty because he had the power to heal. Poverty for us makes us less able to give. Being too generous will destroy a man's ability to give. How could a farmer keep growing crops if he gave all the seed away? Therefore, we need to use wisdom in the way we give, remembering that we must first have before we can give. **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”** (Matthew 11:15).

## Now finish the doing

- **And in this I give judgment, for this is expedient for you who earlier began, from a year ago, not only the doing but also the intending. And now also finish the doing, so that just as was the willingness of the intending, so also to finish from the having** (Second Corinthians 8:10-11).

Paul is now advising them (giving them his judgment, not a command) to expedite the completion of what they had earlier begun a year ago. Apparently the previous year they had planned to make a donation. They intended to contribute but had not yet done it. Paul told them to finish the doing. Intending was a start, but they needed to finish the intending from what they had.

As they previously demonstrated their willingness to intend giving, so now they needed to demonstrate their willingness to finish from what they had. Perhaps they were waiting to accumulate more for a contribution. Paul is telling them the time had come to stop waiting and make the contribution with what they had. It was time to finish the process.

## Giving from having

- **For if the willingness is present, it is acceptable to the extent if some man has, not to the extent he does not have** (Second Corinthians 8:12).

God accepts our generosity to the extent of what we have. He does not expect us to give what we do not have. And that applies to our intending as well. If there is an immediate need, God accepts our generosity when we give from what we have. It is not acceptable to delay contributing to an immediate need by waiting until you have more.

Consider this proverb: **“Clouds and wind without rain, is he who boasts himself of his gifts falsely”** (Proverbs 25:14). Clouds and wind without rain bring drought, and drought brings famine. And a man who says he intends to give, but continues to delay is like clouds and wind without rain.

## Out of parity

- **For it is not so that ease is for others and stress for you, but out of parity your abundance at the present time is for the need of those men. So that the abundance of those men may also happen for your need, so that there may become equity, as it is written, he of much did not abound, and he of little did not lack** (Second Corinthians 8:13-15).

Paul is assuring the brothers at Corinth of the justice in their giving, justice in the sight of God. Their giving was not to add stress for them and give ease for the others, which would not be just. It was to allow them to share their present abundance to help relieve the need of those men (the disciples in Jerusalem). That was so the abundance of those men might also happen for their need.

The disciples at Corinth had an abundance of material things relative to those in Jerusalem. However, they had a need for spiritual things, which the disciples in Jerusalem were able to supply. The disciples in Jerusalem were the men who wrote most of the New Testament. And since that was something they could share with the disciples in the Gentile countries, there would become equity if the Gentiles shared their material abundance with them.

Remember what Paul said in his first letter to them: **“If we sowed spiritual things to you, is it a great thing if we will reap your carnal things?”** (First Corinthians 9:11).

The passage Paul mentioned about not abounding and not lacking is about the Manna that God gave to the sons of Israel while they were in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. When the people first saw it they did not know what it was. The record says, **“And Moses said to them, It is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat. This is the thing which Jehovah has commanded, Gather ye of it every man according to his eating, an omer a head. According to the number of your persons, ye shall take it, every man for those who are in his tent.**

**“And the sons of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they measured it with an omer, he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who**

**gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating”** (Exodus 16:15-18).

Some gathered more, some less. But when it was all measured and distributed they all received equally. Thus, the man who gathered much had no surplus, and the man who gathered little had no lack. Nevertheless, that passage is not promoting communism. What was shared was only the food that was available, not all of their individual possessions. And every man contributed equally to the labor. There were no free handouts. The lesson is that every man who labors should be given the basic necessities of life as with every other man, but only the basic necessities.

### Titus was eager for you

- **But thanks to God who gives the same eagerness for you in the heart of Titus, because he indeed approved the exhortation. But his own will being more zealous, he went forth to you** (Second Corinthians 8:16-17).

Remember, the Holy Spirit of God is in every disciple of Christ. And it is not there in vain, because it does have an influence upon us, but not to give us divinely inspired knowledge or supernatural powers. It works with us through our intellectual knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and in some inner force by helping us best apply our conscience in our decisions.

God’s Spirit in the heart of Titus gave him the same eagerness for the brothers at Corinth that Paul had. Paul knew that because Titus had approved Paul’s exhortation for the Corinthians. However, Titus was apparently even more zealous for the congregation at Corinth, to hasten their contribution for the sanctified of Jerusalem, than Paul was. Therefore, he went forth to them.

Titus had seen for himself how eagerly the brothers there had repented and amended the things Paul had rebuked them about. Also remember, they had received Titus with fear and trembling. And those things probably made the will of Titus more zealous for them, more zealous even than Paul. And that says a great deal.

### Paul sent other men with him

- **And we sent along with him the brother whose praise in the good news is throughout all the congregations. And not only so, but who was also chosen by the congregations, a traveling companion of us with this gift administered by us, for the glory of the same Lord and our willingness** (Second Corinthians 8:18-19).

Paul here speaks of a Christian brother who was sent with Titus to Corinth for their contribution. However, the man is never named. Men have their opinions about who he was, but if the Lord wanted us to know then Paul would have named him.

Paul mentioned the good reputation the man had throughout all the congregations. What Paul meant by the man’s praise was probably about the work he had done. The man must

have performed so well promoting the good news of Christ that he was praised throughout all the congregations.

That brother had also been chosen by the congregations to be a traveling companion with Paul and his co-workmen when they took the contribution to the sanctified in Jerusalem. Which particular congregations had a part in choosing that man is also not told. Remember, the Bible omits many details about many things, but they are all insignificant and unnecessary for us to know.

However, a lesson we can learn from what Paul said is that there were other disciples of Christ besides the apostles, who were well known by all the congregations and were praised for their work with the good news of Christ. Another lesson we can learn is that the congregations cooperated together to choose men for special missions, and no one man was given the right to choose for them.

Men with authority over several congregations, such as Bishops and synods, did not originally exist. They did not exist because they are not a legitimate part of the church of Jesus Christ. The only authorized leaders for the congregations are their own elders. And there must always be more than one of them for each congregation.

Paul said the gift (the collection for the sanctified) was administered by him and his co-workmen, which meant they were responsible for taking the funds to the sanctified in Jerusalem. He also said the gift was for the glory of the same Lord and for their willingness. What he probably meant by the same Lord is that regardless of where congregations of Christ are located, we are all under the same Lord, and our good works bring him glory.

The gift was also for the glory of the willingness of those who were a part of it. That means we also obtain some glory when we willingly sacrifice some of our material possessions to aid our fellow Christians. Of course, such glory should not be our goal, as it was for the hypocritical Pharisees when they made contributions. Nevertheless, it is not wrong for us to have some glory when we make such sacrifices, remembering that the Lord always deserves the ultimate glory.

## Preventing criticism

- **Arranging this lest any man may criticize us in this bounty administered by us, providing things right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men** (Second Corinthians 8:20-21).

Paul was careful to arrange the transportation and transfer of that gift for the sanctified to prevent any man from criticizing them about it. That was no doubt why he sent with Titus that brother who had a good reputation in all the congregations. That man had also been chosen by some of the congregations to be a traveling companion with Paul when they took the gift to the sanctified in Jerusalem.

Paul wanted to provide things right, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And that should always be our goal as well. We should always seek to avoid doing anything that might give cause for criticism. We should certainly always strive to do things right in God's sight. However, we should also strive to do things right in the sight of men.

Nevertheless, as the Bible record proves numerous times, it is impossible to avoid being criticized by some men. Even our Lord was criticized by some. They even condemned him when he did the good work of casting our demons from those possessed by them. Remember how they accused him: **“This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons”** (Matthew 12:24).

We should strive to do things to prevent being criticized, but be not dismayed if sinners criticize you even for a good work. God will judge them.

## Sending another brother

- **And we sent along with them our brother whom we often proved being diligent in many things, but is now much more diligent (with much confidence toward you), whether on behalf of Titus my partner and co-workman for you, or our brothers, representatives of congregations, a glory of Christ** (Second Corinthians 8:22-23).

Paul here says he sent along another brother with Titus and the other man, but he did not name either of them. However, as with the first man Paul also praised the second man. He said the man had been often proved being diligent in many things. Diligence is a virtue that we all desire in men. And Paul said the man had been often proved being diligent. And not only being diligent, but being diligent in many things.

Too often men will be diligent with only a few things. But God wants us all to be diligent in all things that are good. For Solomon said, **“He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but he who searches after evil, it shall come to him”** (Proverbs 11:27).

Paul said the man, having proven himself diligent in many things, the man was now much more diligent, whether on behalf of Titus, Paul’s partner and co-workman for them, or on behalf of their brothers, representatives of congregations, which Paul said were a glory of Christ. A glory of Christ is the congregations of his disciples that comprise his church, the kingdom of God.

The churches of Christ are like a shining light upon a hill in the midst of a dark and sinful world. That is true of the genuine congregations, because there are now many counterfeit churches. And the light of the word of God, the Bible, reveals which are genuine and which are counterfeit.

Since there were many congregations that joined the fellowship of service for the sanctified with their contributions, each one must have sent representatives to Paul and the others who were responsible for administering that gift. Paul also said the man had much confidence toward the church at Corinth, which was probably one reason why Paul and the others sent him to Corinth with Titus and the other man.

## Proving love and boasting

- **Therefore show ye the proof of your love and our boast about you, for them in the face of the congregations. For indeed it is superfluous for me to write to you about the service for the sanctified. For I know your willingness,**

**which I boast about you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was prepared from a year ago. And your zeal provoked the majority** (Second Corinthians 8:24-9:2).

Paul had boasted to the Macedonians about the willingness of the Christians at Corinth to contribute to the service for the sanctified. And apparently in his boast Paul included other congregations that were in the province of Achaia. However, we have no record in the Bible that he ever sent letters to them as he had to the congregation at Corinth.

Paul said it was not necessary for him to write them about making a contribution to aid the sanctified in Jerusalem, because he knew how willing they were. His exhortation for them was that they not continue to delay their contribution. And he explains that in the next passage.

Paul told them he was so confident about their willingness to give that he boasted about them to the Macedonians, boasting that **“Achaia was prepared from a year ago.”** When Paul said the results of their zeal provoked the majority, he probably meant the majority of the Macedonians; although he could have meant the majority of the congregations.

And that response by the majority is not unusual. Our zeal for a good work can provoke the zeal of others. Zeal for a good work is contagious. Mankind is instinctively social. That is why evil works such as riots can spread so quickly. However, the extent to which a good work or an evil work is provoked in many people depends primarily upon the quality of their character.

The good character of the disciples of Christ in Macedonia made them especially prone to be provoked into a good work. Compassionate people are easily provoked to compassion. Lawless people are easily provoked into rioting and lawlessness.

### To help them be prepared

- **But I sent the brothers so that our boast about you would not be empty in this regard. So that, as I said, ye may be prepared, if somehow Macedonians should come with me and find you unprepared, we (that we might not say, ye) would be embarrassed in this confidence of boast.**
- **Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brothers that they would go ahead to you, and arrange in advance your gift that was earlier announced, for this to be ready this way as a gift and not as an exaction** (Second Corinthians 9:3-5).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that he did not doubt their willingness. He told them he sent the brothers so they would be prepared with their contribution. Because he had boasted about them to the Macedonians, he did not want any of them who might come with him to find the Corinthians were unprepared.

Remember, Paul with some other men were going to take the joint contributions to the sanctified in Jerusalem. And if the contribution from Corinth was not ready when they departed, that would have been very embarrassing for both Paul and the congregation at

Corinth. Paul included himself as liable to be embarrassed because of his confident boast to the Macedonians about the congregation at Corinth.

Paul explained that was the reason he exhorted the brothers to go ahead to them. He wanted those brothers to help them arrange their gift in advance, which they had earlier announced. Paul wanted to be sure it was ready to add to the gifts of the other congregations when he departed for Jerusalem.

Notice the complete lack of commandments in his words. In his first letter he had given them many commandments. However, Paul is here speaking about their generosity. And unlike the law of Moses, we have no commandments about such things. Our contributions are to be gifts not exactions. Men who claim we are committed to tithe are wrong. They are like the Jews that Jesus rebuked for adding their own commands to the laws of Moses. There is nothing in the New Testament about our tithing.

We are not under law to God, as Paul said: **“But if ye are led by the Spirit ye are not under law”** (Galatians 5:18). We who are faithful disciples of Christ are led by the Spirit of God. Therefore, we are not subject to statutes and ordinances. We are commanded to do a few things, but we are not commanded to do things like tithe. Our spirit of love and compassion, plus our good judgment determines things like our generosity. Therefore, Paul gave them no commandments about that gift. Indeed, he did not even command them to give anything.

## Sowing and reaping

- **But this, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows in blessings will also reap in blessings** (Second Corinthians 9:6).

Although Paul gave no commandments about generosity, he did teach about giving. And as the Lord had done many times, he used an example of growing crops. His example is actually a proverb. Solomon gave several proverbs about generosity. Here are two of them: **“There is he who scatters, and increases yet more, and there he is who withholds more than is proper, but only to want. The generous soul shall be made prosperous, and he who waters shall also be watered himself”** (Proverbs 11:24-25).

And just as growing crops conforms to God’s laws of nature, so our generosity conforms to his laws. We can, therefore, be sure that our generosity will be rewarded in kind. For God has many ways to repay us for our generosity.

## Let each man choose how he gives

- **Each man as he purposes in his heart, not from regret or from necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver** (Second Corinthians 9:7).

That statement makes it very clear that our generosity is a completely individual decision. Paul said “each man” was to give as he himself purposes in his heart. And our giving was not to be from necessity. Such things as tithing are to be completely voluntary. If a man chooses to tithe, that is his personal choice.

Paul also said that our giving was not to be from regret. That means we are not to give grudgingly. When we give, it must be cheerfully. Whenever you given grudgingly the only appreciation you will have is from those who receive it, because God is not pleased with gifts given grudgingly. To have value in his sight our generosity must be done cheerfully.

## God provides sufficient for our works

- **And God is able to abound all grace for you, so that always in everything having all sufficiency, ye may abound for every good work, as it is written, He has scattered abroad. He has given to the poor. His righteousness endures into the age.**
- **And he who supplies seed to the man who sows, and bread for eating, may he supply and multiply your seed, and may he increase the fruits of your righteousness, being enriched in everything for every generosity, which works gratitude to God through us** (Second Corinthians 9:8-11).

God is able to do anything. Therefore, he can certainly give sufficiently for us to be able to abound for every good work. By his grace for us, by his kindness and compassion, he provides more than enough for us to live on. Therefore, we virtually always have sufficiently for every good work, including our generosity toward those in need. The passage that Paul quoted is from the psalms: **“He has scattered, he has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever”** (Psalm 112:9).

Paul then called upon God to multiply his blessings upon us for our generosity. Remember, what Paul wrote earlier to the Christians at Corinth was not for them only. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to say things that provide lessons for all Christians. And what Paul wrote here to the Corinthians about generosity was meant for us as well.

God is he who supplies seed with which farmers grow their crops to supply our food. There is no man upon the earth who is able to create seeds. All men can do is plant and cultivate them, and then wait for God to cause them to grow and multiply. And unlike what sinners say, God is actively involved with the process. It is not automatic. I write much more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

After honoring God with those words, Paul then asked God (1) to supply and multiply our seed, and (2) to increase the fruits of our righteousness. His use of the words seed and fruits is, of course, figurative. They symbolize our productivity for whatever is good and right in the sight of God. And God has given each one of us our own talents and resources to use productively as best we can in whatever way we can.

Here is the passage that Paul quoted about God supplying seed and bread: **“For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and returns not there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please. And it shall prosper in the thing to which I sent it”** (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Paul then spoke of how God enriches us **“in everything for every generosity ... .”** One of the wonderful things about our generosity to those in need is that God will reward us, even if nobody else knows about our giving. For Solomon said, **“He who has pity upon a poor man lends to Jehovah, and he will repay him his good deed”** (Proverbs 19:17). And remember what Jesus said about not broadcasting our generosity: **“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 6:3-4).

There are many passages in the Bible that tell how God rewards generosity. Here is one from the prophet Hosea: **“Sow to yourselves in righteousness. Reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek Jehovah, till he comes and rains righteousness upon you”** (Hosea 10:12). And using figurative language, Solomon said, **“Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shall find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, yea, even to eight, for thou know not what evil shall be upon the earth”** (Ecclesiastes 11:1-2). And related to that, Jesus said, **“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).

Paul said that God would enrich us in everything for every generosity. God will enrich us for every kind of generosity, generosity to those who are genuinely in need. And he will enrich us in everything. He will enrich us in every part of our lives because of our generosity. But that will only happen if we have faith in him and trust his promises. Just as the farmer must trust God to grow his crops when he buries his seed in the ground, so we must trust God to bless us when we are generous to worthy souls in need.

God will not bless us when we are generous to those who are not in need. Indeed, Solomon said that those who give to the rich are deprived instead of being blessed: **“He who oppresses a poor man to his increase, and he who gives to a rich man, comes only to want”** (Proverbs 22:16).

Paul also told how our generosity plus God’s rewards for it, all work gratitude to God through us. Knowing that we are generous because we belong to Christ brings gratitude to God. People learn that we are generous because of God. Therefore, they are grateful to God because of us. The most generous people in the world are Christians. The most generous nations of the world are those with the Spirit of Christ in them.

Satan seeks to blind people about the source of their blessings. Therefore, it is important for us to let people know that the good we do, including our generosity, is because we belong to God through our Lord Christ. It is important because it works gratitude to God. And that not only encourages the faithful, but it can also help lead lost souls to him.

## Many good things from this ministry

- **Because the service of this ministry is not only supplying the needs of the sanctified, but also abounding through many thanksgivings to God through the evidence of this service, glorifying God at the subjection of your confession toward the good news of the Christ, and at the generosity of the participation, for them and for all, and by their supplication about you,**

**yearning for you because of the transcending grace of God in you. And thanks to God for his indescribable gift (Second Corinthians 9:12-15).**

The primary goal of the service of that ministry was to supply the needs of the sanctified, those in Jerusalem. However, Paul said the service of that ministry was doing many good things besides providing for the needs of the sanctified.

It was also abounding (1) through many thanksgivings to God through the evidence of that service, (2) glorifying God at the subjection of their confession toward the good news of the Christ, (3) glorifying God at the generosity of the participation, for them and for all, (4) glorifying God by their supplication about them, and (5) yearning for them because of the transcending grace of God in them

The evidence of that service was causing many thanksgivings to God. People were seeing and appreciating the great generosity coming from many congregations of Christ. Those in Israel were also seeing how much the needy disciples of Christ there were being helped. There was much evidence of the service that could be seen. And that evidence caused many thanksgiving to God.

The service of that ministry also brought glory to God at the subjection of their confession toward the good news of Christ. Their confession was the proclamation of their faith in Christ Jesus and his good news of our salvation. And their subjection to that faith in him caused them to open their hearts to contribute for the needs of the sanctified. And that too brought glory to God.

The service of that ministry also brought glory to God at the generosity of the participation, for them and for all. Not only did they open their hearts to contribute for the needs of the sanctified, but they demonstrated their generosity in that participation. They were generous not only for the needy disciples in Jerusalem, but also for all of the sanctified who might be in need.

Paul said the service of that ministry also brought glory to God by their supplication about them. They were not only willing to participate and be generous about it, but they prayed to God on their behalf. And they obviously prayed fervently because they yearned for them. Paul said they prayed that way because of the transcending grace of God in them. That means they had a spirit of the loving generosity of God within them. And they had that spirit in an exceptional degree. And we should all have the transcending grace of God in us.

Paul also himself gave thanks to God for his indescribable gift. The grace of God he has given us is truly indescribable. It not only includes the many good things he provides for us in this life, but it includes the incomparably wonderful blessings of eternal life with him in heaven.

Regarding our contributions, remember, giving thanks to God and glorifying him because of a gift can only happen when people know the gift is from those who are serving God. It brings no glory and thankfulness to him when that is concealed. Remember that if you are ever asked to contribute for something when God cannot be mentioned.

## The meekness and the boldness of Paul

- **Now I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who indeed am lowly in presence among you, but am bold toward you when absent. But I pray not to be bold when present with the confidence by which I consider to be valiant toward some who consider us as walking according to flesh** (Second Corinthians 10:1-2).

In this part of his letter Paul defends himself from his enemies in the congregation there. He first appeals to the brothers there not to do anything that would force him to change his disposition away from being lowly in their presence to being bold toward them. And he said he was making his appeal to them in the spirit of the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

Jesus was indeed meek and gentle toward those who believed in him. Remember these words he said to them: **“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).

However, Jesus was bold toward his enemies. Remember how severely he rebuked the leaders of the Jews. On one occasion he uttered these words to them eight times: **“Woe to you, scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites!”** (Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29). And each time he gave reasons why they deserved those curses. How many men have you ever heard, who claim to be Christians, have ever been so bold as to speak that way to the religious leaders of our day?

Paul did not want to speak with such boldness toward his enemies in the congregation while he came to them. He preferred to warn them in advance with his letters, hoping he would not need to be bold when he came. Nevertheless, he assured them he had the confidence he considered to be valiant toward his enemies there.

Those men considered Paul and his co-workmen as **“walking according to flesh.”** That means those enemies thought he and his co-workmen were no different from men of the world, and were not walking according to the Spirit of God. Those men obviously did not recognize Paul and his co-workmen as being genuine ambassadors for Christ working for spiritual things. No doubt their own minds were oriented toward things of the world, and they thought that was also true of Paul and his co-workmen.

## The weapons of our warfare

- **For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

Paul said that although they were walking in flesh, they did not war according to flesh. Every one of us who lives in this world is walking in flesh. Our spirits are housed in bod-

ies of flesh, and we must live in the world according to God's laws of nature here. However, we do not war according to flesh. Our fight is against sin and wickedness. And our weapons are not carnal, not the material things of the world.

Nevertheless, he also said our weapons were mighty in God. That means they have the power of God behind them, although not in any supernatural way. The might of God has the power to conquer even without supernatural intervention. And Paul described how we use those weapons of our warfare.

He said they were mighty in God for (1) the demolition of strongholds, (2) casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, (3) bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and (4) having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled.

Paul said they demolish the strongholds of the devil and his disciples. Satan has many strongholds in the world because most of the people have given themselves over to him. Those strongholds are every kind of power that supports sin and wickedness and opposes Christ and his good news of salvation.

Examples of such strongholds are most of the rulers of the world and their corrupt legal systems, the entertainment business, the educational systems, and the communication media. Our weapons always demolish such strongholds eventually. They demolish them with the power of truth by exposing their deceit and corruption.

Paul said the weapons of our warfare also cast down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God. The vain imaginations of men have filled the world with all kinds of false ideas and theories, including the invention of many religions and ideologies, which things have been exalted against the knowledge of God.

Examples of such things are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Catholicism, evolution theory, communism, and humanism. Every one of those false beliefs (created from the imaginations of men) have been exalted against the teachings of the word of God, the Holy Bible.

Paul said the weapons of our warfare also bring every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ. Whether willfully in this life, or forcefully in the next life, every thought will become captive into the obedience of the Christ.

God will reward us with eternal sonship in heaven if we willfully repent of our sins and submit our every thought into obedience for Christ. However, unrepentant sinners will obey Christ under a rod of iron. The apostle John told about that when he described his great vision of heaven: **“And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sits upon it called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems having names written, and a name written that none knows except he himself, and clothed in a garment dipped in blood. And his name is called The Word of God.**

**“And the armies in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, pure white. And a sharp two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, so that he would smite the nations by it. And he will tend them with a rod of iron. And he treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God. And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”** (Revelation 19:11-16).

And Paul said the weapons of our warfare also have in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever our obedience is fulfilled. The time when our obedience is fulfilled will be at the end of the world and the final judgment. God has promised to punish the disobedient when all the righteous souls—past, present, and future—have fulfilled their suffering upon the earth.

John also wrote about that when describing his vision of heaven: **“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).

There are many scriptures that speak of the punishment of those who are disobedient to God. Here is another one about the final judgment: **“Since it is a righteous thing according to God to repay restriction to those who restrict you, and relief with us, to you who are restricted, at the revealing of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his agents of power in a fire of flame rendering vengeance to those who have not known God, and to those not obeying the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**“Men who will suffer punishment, a penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified in his sanctified, and to be marveled in that day by all those who believe (because our testimony among you was believed)”** (Second Thessalonians 1:6-10).

## Looking according to appearance

- **Ye are looking at things according to appearance** (Second Corinthians 10:7).

Remember what Paul said earlier about looking at things according to appearance: **“For we are not commending ourselves again to you, but giving you an opportunity of boasting about us, so that ye may have for those who boast in appearance and not in heart”** (Second Corinthians 5:12).

As sons of God we should not boast in appearance. Nor should we look at things superficially, according to appearance. We should look deeper, at the heart. But the Christians at Corinth were not doing that.

## Paul's authority

- **If any man has convinced himself to be of Christ, let him consider this again of himself, that, as he is of Christ, so also are we of Christ. 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** (Second Corinthians 10:7-9).

Convincing ourselves that we are of Christ means having confidence that Christ is with us. And Paul is saying that if any man thinks that way about himself then he should recognize that Paul and his co-workmen were also of Christ, and Christ was with them. There were some men in the congregation there who were boasting of themselves, and belittling Paul and his co-workmen. Paul speaks more about them farther in this letter.

Paul says that even if he were to boast somewhat more abundantly about his authority and that of his co-workmen, he would not be shamed. He would not be shamed because he had proven beyond doubt that Christ had given them their authority to speak for him and his good news of salvation.

Remember, however, that was before the New Testament had been written. Now that we have it, no man has a right to claim authority from Christ to speak for him. Men like the Roman Catholic Popes who claim authority to speak for Christ beyond the words of the New Testament are frauds. Some of them even preach against the words of the New Testament, and the Catholic Pope is one of the worse offenders.

Notice how Paul said the Lord gave them their authority for building up and not for tearing them down. The good news of Christ is not only for our soul's salvation, but it is also for our spiritual growth, both our personal growth and the growth of the kingdom of God, especially our unity together. The authority that Paul and his co-workmen had was to promote the growth and development of God's kingdom, which on the earth is the church and every member of it.

Paul said it was not to tear them down, but to build up. Therefore, they had no need to be terrified by his letters; that was not their purpose. His letters, written with the authority of Christ, were not to defeat and divide them. Paul was no doubt referring to the several rebukes he gave them in his first letter. The purpose of those rebukes, as well as everything else he had written, was for making them better, to help the spiritual growth and strength of them and their congregation.

## Paul's letters versus his presence

- **Because, 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 accused of being very different in his letters compared with his presence. However, notice from the wording of the passage that the accusation was made by one man. Although other things Paul said in this letter indicate he had more than one enemy in the congregation there, that particular accusation was apparently made by only one of them.

Nevertheless, the accusation does reveal something about the apostle Paul. Regarding his letters, anyone who reads them can see they are weighty and powerful. However, he was accused of having both a weak appearing body and disdainful speech. And notice how Paul did not dispute that description of him.

Since the first century no man has seen how Paul appeared in his flesh, nor has any man heard him speak. This passage tells us that his bodily presence was weak. Yet he was a

man of great moral strength and courage, as the Bible record clearly shows. The strength of a man's spirit is what reveals the kind of man he is.

What is meant by Paul's speech being disdained is not clear. We know from examples in the book of Acts that the words of his speeches were powerful. Therefore, that accusation about his speech must refer to the manner of his voice.

Two men can give a speech using exactly the same words, but the effect on their listeners can vary greatly. The manner of a man's speaking often decides how well his speech is received. That is why success in an oral debate too often depends more on *how* a man speaks than on *what* he speaks. And that reminds me of what a preacher said about one of his sermons. The preacher had made this note in his written sermon: "Argument weak here. Pound the lectern."

## Being the same in letters and in presence

- **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** (Second Corinthians 10:11).

The accusation about how Paul's letters differed from his presence was a false one, and Paul wanted his accuser to know it. His accuser was making the mistake of judging by a man's appearance and not by his spirit. Remember, Paul had already condemned that kind of judging.

Paul and his co-workmen were the same men wherever they were. The spirit of Paul was always weighty and powerful. However, he did not always reveal his power because he wanted to show the meekness and gentleness of Christ toward them. Remember, he said he did not want to be bold when he was with them.

Consider this passage that reveals the power and boldness of Paul when he wanted to use it: **"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. 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"** (Acts 13:6-11).

Paul was the same man with the same power and capacity for boldness when he was with those Corinthians. He just did not want to use it because he loved them; he loved them as his own children. Remember what he said to them in his first letter: **"I do not write these things shaming you, but I warn you as my beloved children"** (First Corinthians 4:14).

## Comparing themselves

- **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** (Second Corinthians 10:12).

It is foolish to compare ourselves by ourselves and to ourselves. We can certainly compare each other according to various attributes and abilities. And we can judge who is better or worse in various tasks. However, to say that one Christian is better than another cannot be done. Who would say that Peter was a better person than Mary the mother of Jesus, or that she was better than Peter? God has given us all different abilities, resources, and opportunities. Therefore, how can we compare when nobody is given exactly the same things?

Those men who commended themselves by measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves to themselves, did not understand. They were still judging by appearances, by superficial things, by worldly things, and not by spiritual things. And Paul and his co-workmen would not be a part of that foolish game.

## Things immeasurable

- **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 10:13).

Paul said he and his co-workmen would not boast in things immeasurable. The quality of a man's spirit cannot be measured. His faith and trust in God cannot be measured. His love for the Lord and for his neighbor cannot be measured.

Instead, Paul and his co-workmen chose to boast according to the measure of the standard that God apportioned to them. Since each man is blessed (or apportioned) with different abilities, resources, and opportunities, Paul and his co-workmen would boast of how well they had used those things in their service to Christ and his good news of salvation. And Paul said the measure that God apportioned to him and his co-workmen was to reach out to the Gentiles with the good news of Christ.

Before any man can boast he must compare how well he did according to God's standard for him. And remember, our knowledge of God's standards for us is revealed in his holy word, the Bible. That is the standard each of us must use when we decide if we can boast. We can boast about how well we measured according to that standard as it applies to the particular things that God apportioned to us.

## Boast not in things immeasurable

- **For it is not as not reaching for you. We overextend ourselves. For we even reached as far as you in the good news of the Christ, not boasting in things immeasurable, in other men's labors, but having hope of your faith growing in you to be enlarged according to our measure for abundance, in order to**

**preach the good news beyond you, not to boast in another measure, in things prepared** (Second Corinthians 10:14-16).

When Paul said they overextended themselves that indicates they went beyond what God had required of them. Paul told of God's requirement for him when he was on trial before king Agrippa. After telling Agrippa about seeing the exceedingly bright light from heaven, Paul said, **"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 26:14-18).

That vision was when Jesus appointed Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. As Paul told the Christians in Rome, **"For I speak to you the Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am indeed an apostle of Gentiles ..."** (Romans 11:13). Being an apostle of the Gentiles was what Jesus required of Paul.

However, Jesus gave Paul no specific commands about how to conduct that work. With a few exceptions, he did not tell him which countries to which he must go, nor in which cities he must preach. Nor did Jesus give him any instructions about any other details of his evangelism to the Gentiles, none that we know about. Although the Holy Spirit did command him once not to go to Asia (see Acts 16:6), he did preach there later.

Hence, Paul was free to use his own judgment about how best to preach the good news of Christ to the Gentiles. And we too are free to use our own judgment about how best to serve Christ in our lives. Remember, as disciples of Christ we are all 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).

An example that illustrates Paul's freedom in his work is found in his first letter to the Corinthians. He spoke about his rights as an apostle, and among the things he said was, **"Know ye not that those being employed at the sacred things eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar are partakers at the altar? And so the Lord commanded those who proclaim the good news to live from the good news."**

**"But I have used none of these things, and I did not write these things so that it should be done to me this way. For it is good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my boasting empty. 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."**

**"For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward, but if involuntarily, I have been entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? That, while preaching the good news, I may make the good news of the Christ without charge, in order not to make full use of my right in the good news"** (First Corinthians 9:13-18).

Paul was obligated to bring the good news of Christ to the Gentiles. He even said he would be under a curse (“**woe is to me**”) if he did not preach it to them. However, Paul went beyond his obligation by not making full use of his right in the good news; he preached the good news of Christ to them without charge. And that gave him cause to boast.

Not all boasting is wrong. Boasting is expressing your pride. And remember, one of the definitions of pride is having delight or satisfaction in your achievements. Therefore, boasting of that kind of pride is not wrong. That was the kind of boasting Paul did. He could boast that he had gone beyond the measure of the standard that God had apportioned to him. Remember, Paul said, **“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.”**

Paul and his co-workmen, in their zeal to fulfill **“the measure of the standard that God apportioned”** to them, they reached even as far as the Corinthians. Corinth was about a thousand mile journey from Antioch, which was where Paul began his evangelical work to the Gentiles. In those days traveling that far by sea took several days. Traveling that far by land took several weeks. Therefore, Paul could boast about bringing the good news of Christ as far as to them.

Indeed, Paul was so zealous for Christ and his good news of salvation that he even planned to travel to Spain. For in his letter to the Romans, he said, **“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 15:23-24). However, there is no evidence in the Bible that he was ever able to go there. God does not guarantee our success with every goal we set in our work for him.

Paul had tremendous love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He also had great love for all who belong to Christ. Paul’s love for Jesus and all who belong to him can be seen in many parts of the books he wrote.

Jesus sometimes referred to those who belong to him as sheep. For example, he said to the Jews who did not believe in 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).

Also remember what Jesus said to Peter after his resurrection: **“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).

Paul no doubt knew about that command which Jesus gave to Peter. Therefore, Paul was very zealous to call the sheep of Jesus and feed them the knowledge of the good news of Christ. Consequently, those whom he had converted were also part of his boast. As he said to the brothers at Thessalonica, **“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boast? Or is it not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming?”** (First Thessalonians 2:19).

Paul did not want to boast **“in things immeasurable, in other men’s labors ... .”** He was not going to boast or commend himself by comparing himself with what other men were doing. Such comparisons are immeasurable because there are too many things that are different for each man. Paul would only boast about the work he had done according to **“the standard that God apportioned to”** him, which was to preach the good news to the Gentiles.

Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen preached the good news even as far as the Corinthians. They even wanted to go beyond them, but they would not leave the new disciples too soon. Paul did not want to leave them prematurely, lest their labors be in vain by departing before those new disciples had become strong enough in their faith to endure without his oversight. Remember, the New Testament had not yet been written. And there have always been aggressive men, disciples of the devil, who seek to manipulate and control other people for their own benefit.

Thus, when knowledge of the word of God, and faith in Christ by the Corinthian Christians grew strong and mature in them, then Paul and his co-workmen could preach the good news even farther. Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen had hope in the faith of the Corinthians that it would grow in them **“to be enlarged according to our measure for abundance... .”**

Our measure for abundance comes from the standards that God has set forth in his holy word, the Bible. It is by those standards that we must judge our lives and our fruitfulness in God’s service, which is our abundance. That abundance is our productivity in spiritual things. That means to bring new souls to Christ and/or to help their spirits grow to perfection.

As Paul said to the brothers at Ephesus: **“And indeed he gave the apostles, and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of the sanctified, for the work of ministry, for edification of the body of the Christ. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to a standard of stature of the fullness of the Christ”** (Ephesians 4:11-13).

## He who boasts should boast in the Lord

- **But he who boasts should boast in the Lord. For he who commends himself, that man is not approved, but whom the Lord commends** (Second Corinthians 10:17-18).

Boasting is proclaiming pride about something. And the good kind of pride is taking delight and satisfaction about whatever we are boasting about. Our delight and satisfaction should be that we belonging to the Lord as children of God, which should eclipse every

other kind of delight and satisfaction. Therefore, when we boast we should boast in the Lord.

We should boast in him, not only because we belong to him, but because of what he has done for us and has promised us for the future. We can express some satisfaction in our worldly achievements. But our boasting should always be in the Lord and whatever we accomplish in his service.

For example, when Paul wrote about having a boast, he said it was a boast in Christ Jesus in things toward God: **“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.**

**“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 15:15-19).

Boasting about yourself independent of God is the wrong kind of boasting. We should always confess that God is the source of all our blessings. If we are able to achieve something good, we should recognize that it could only happen with his help.

Moreover, as Paul said, he who commends himself is not approved. Only the man whom the Lord commends is approved. Therefore, let no man boast of himself independent of God, because that would make him a liar. I speak much more about God’s intimate involvement in all that happens in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Now not every disciple can preach or evangelize like Paul and his co-workmen. Yet we can still serve the Lord using whatever talents and opportunities we have. For example, remember the story 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). Peter then raised her from the dead.

Also remember what Paul said about bondmen: **“Bondmen, be obedient to the masters according to flesh, with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your heart as to the Christ. Not according to eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, bond-serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to men. Knowing that whatever good thing each may do, he will receive this from the Lord, whether bondman or freeman”** (Ephesians 6:5-8).

## Asking them to tolerate his foolishness

- **O that ye tolerated a little of my foolishness, but tolerate me too** (Second Corinthians 11:1).

In his first letter to them Paul spoke of what he called “**the foolishness of God.**” Remember however, what Paul called the foolishness of God only seems that way to his enemies, because there is no real foolishness of God. Likewise, Paul’s foolishness was not a real foolishness. It was a device he used to defend himself against his enemies.

Therefore, he asked the Christians at Corinth to tolerate a little of his “foolishness.” They were tolerating the real foolishness of his enemies, and Paul wanted them to tolerate his too. He wanted them to tolerate it because it was a defense he was using against his enemies in the congregation there.

## He was jealous for them

- **For I am jealous for you with a jealousy of God** (Second Corinthians 11:2).

God is indeed a jealous God. For he said in the second of his ten commandments, “**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, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments**” (Exodus 20:4-6).

One of the laws of Moses even told how God’s name is Jealous: “**Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where thou go, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee. But ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and ye shall cut down their Asherim, for thou shall worship no other god. For Jehovah, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God**” (Exodus 34:12-14).

People often confuse jealousy with envy. Envy is desiring what someone else has, not something like it. Jealousy is the desire to protect what belongs to you. A husband is justified in being jealous for his wife when their relationship is threatened. A mother is justified in being jealous for her children when they are threatened. And God is certainly justified in being jealous for what belongs to him.

Therefore, Paul was justified in being jealous for his Christian brothers, the disciples of Christ at Corinth. And it was a jealousy of God. For like everything else jealousy can be misused. It can be overbearing and oppressive. It is not the jealous that is wrong, it is how it is misused. The kind of jealousy Paul had for them was a righteous jealousy, a justified jealousy, a jealousy of God.

## He betrothed them to the Christ

- **For I betrothed you to one husband, a pure virgin to present to the Christ** (Second Corinthians 11:2).

The book of Revelation speaks of the marriage of the Lamb. The Lamb is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And all who belong to him are his bride. Remember, collectively we are one body in Christ. Therefore, collectively we are the bride of Christ.

When John told of his great vision of heaven he described the time of that marriage: **“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). The Lamb is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when Paul brought them to Christ, to make them his disciples, he betrothed them. Since all who belong to Christ comprise his bride, then whoever brings us to Christ to be joined to him, betroths us to Christ. And Paul had brought them to Christ.

He said they were a pure virgin that he presented to the Christ. They were not pure before they were immersed in water for the remission of their sins. Even Paul was not pure. For one of the first commandments of Christ that Paul received (through the disciple Ananias) after Jesus appeared to him in a vision on the road to Damascus, was, **“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).

After the people at Corinth had been properly immersed in water for the remission of their sins, then they were a pure virgin presented to the Christ. Therefore, dear reader, if you want to be part of the bride of Christ, you must be immersed in water for the remission of your sins so that you can be a pure virgin in spirit for him. Let not men deceive you and discourage you from that very simple but absolutely essential requirement.

## He fears they will be corrupted

- **But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent enticed Eve by his craftiness, so your thoughts might be corrupted from the simplicity in the Christ** (Second Corinthians 11:3).

Paul was jealous for them because he feared Satan would use his craftiness to entice them as he had enticed Eve. He feared their thoughts might be corrupted from the simplicity in the Christ. Satan does his dirty work through men who follow him. And there were such men in the congregation there at Corinth. Paul exposes those men a little farther on.

Notice how Paul mentioned the simplicity in the Christ. The Catholic Church is no doubt the most successful movement that has corrupted the thoughts of believers away from the simplicity in the Christ. That corruption started when aggressive men began to appoint themselves ruling bishops. Moreover, such men claimed equal authority with the original apostles to speak for Christ. And they gradually created an elaborate hierarchy of control,

and an elaborate doctrine and system of ritual with much pomp and ceremony. Such men scoff at people who practice the simplicity of Christ, calling it “the primitive church.”

None of those things they have done is justified by the word of God. And any man who reads the scriptures of the Bible can see that Church is an instrument of the devil that has corrupted the minds of many believers from the simplicity in the Christ.

## Preaching another Jesus

- **For indeed if a man who comes, preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach, or ye receive another spirit that ye did not receive, or another good news that ye did not accept, ye well tolerated it** (Second Corinthians 11:4).

The disciples at Corinth (1) tolerated the preaching of another Jesus whom Paul and his co-workmen had not preached, (2) they tolerated receiving another spirit that they had not received, and (3) they tolerated another good news that they had not accepted.

Jesus warned his disciples that other men would claim to be the Christ: **“For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will lead many astray”** (Matthew 24:5). Notice, however, Paul did not say the brothers at Corinth tolerated the preaching of another Christ. That was not the problem.

They were tolerating the preaching of another Jesus in the sense of describing him different from what he really was. And that is a very common problem in modern times. Most people now have a false opinion about what Jesus was like. The popular conception of Jesus is much distorted from the truth; it is another Jesus, a false Jesus.

Therefore, I have no doubt that most people, including believers, would reject an accurate description of Jesus. They would proclaim that was not what he was like, because their concept of him has been so corrupted. And the disciples at Corinth were tolerating such false preaching of what Jesus was like.

They also tolerated receiving another spirit. When he said spirit he was referring to an energizing force within them, and such spirits vary. For example, a man can have within him a humble spirit or a spirit of pride, a hateful spirit or a loving spirit. He can also have a spirit of meekness, a spirit of wisdom, or a spirit of compassion. All of those kinds of spirits energize a man to think and behave in different kinds of ways. They energize a man because that is the nature of spirits. I describe the nature of spirits much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for eternity*.

God wants us to have the Spirit of Christ within us. And that was the kind of spirit that Paul and his co-workmen brought to the disciples of Christ there. However, those disciples were receiving another spirit, another energizing force in their hearts. One that was not brought to them by Paul and his co-workmen, one that was not in accord with the will of God.

Paul also said they were tolerating another good news that they had not accepted. The good news they had accepted was the good news of Jesus Christ. But they were tolerating another good news, which was not genuine good news. It was a counterfeit good news. And the world is filled with that kind of good news. Indeed, most of what is preached about the teachings of Christ is a counterfeit good news. It is counterfeit because it is a dis-

tortion of what the word of God actually teaches. Study the Bible for yourself and you will see—if you have an open mind to learn.

## Paul defends himself

- **For I reckon to come short in nothing of those, superlative apostles** (Second Corinthians 11:5).

When Paul referred to his enemies there as superlative apostles, that was probably how they were promoting themselves. Remember how one of them scoffed about Paul, saying, **“The letters, he says, are indeed weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is disdained”** (Second Corinthians 10:10). They were probably contrasting themselves as much stronger and more talented than Paul.

However, there may have also been some sarcasm in Paul’s choice of those words. The prophet Isaiah used much sarcasm to mock men who make and worship idols. Here is how he described them: **“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 [worship] 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).

## Paul was not unskilled in knowledge

- **But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet not in knowledge, but in everything made known in all things to you** (Second Corinthians 11:6).

Paul here virtually confesses that he was not skilled in delivering speeches. Nevertheless, he also said he was not unskilled in knowledge. The examples we have in the book of Acts of his speeches and sermons show how much knowledge he had and how skilled he was with it. For example, when Paul was on trial in Caesarea before king Agrippa, the record says, **“And Agrippa said to Paul, By a little thou persuade me to become a Christian”** (Acts 26:28).

Paul also assured the brothers at Corinth that he had in everything made known in all things to them. In other words, there were no other men or spirits or doctrines that he had not made known to them. Therefore, they should not tolerate any other Jesus, or any other spirit, or any other good news. Nor should we tolerate them, because they are a threat to the body of Christ. They are like germs that invade our bodies of flesh. We can identify and combat those false things about Christ and his church by our knowledge of the Bible.

## Lowering himself for them to be lifted up

- **Or did I commit a sin lowering myself so that ye might be lifted up, because I preached to you the good news of God freely? I robbed other congregations, having taken a wage in order for your service. And being present with you, and when needy, I was a burden to no man. For the brothers who came from Macedonia, they supplied my need. And in everything I kept and I will keep myself non-burdensome to you** (Second Corinthians 11:7-9).

It seems to be human nature to devalue whatever is given freely. In the back of the building of the congregation where I worship, I have set out some of my books to give away freely. One visitor told me that people think books that are given freely are inferior. But I still give them freely. I will gladly lower myself so that like Paul I might help others be lifted up.

Paul gave his preaching and teaching of the good news of Christ freely to the people at Corinth. Giving it to them freely lowered himself because it took away from his right to be supported by the good news. Nevertheless, he still gave it to them freely because he wanted them to be lifted up by that good news. And I give my books freely because I want to follow in the steps of great men like Paul. I want to do what I can to promote the good news of Christ, even if it means giving the fruits of my labor freely.

Every man has daily needs for food and shelter. And the burden of providing those things to Paul might have hindered their acceptance of, and growth in, the good news. That would have been especially true if the congregation there began as a very small group. Each member would have had a heavy burden to contribute to his support.

When Paul said he robbed other congregations he was, of course, speaking figuratively. He took a wage from them so that he could serve the congregation at Corinth. Perhaps

Paul took a wage that he considered more than adequate for him, because he wanted to use the surplus for his work at Corinth. That may be why he said he robbed them.

Here is a passage that tells how one congregation shared with Paul in giving and receiving: **“And ye Philippians also have seen that, in the beginning of the good news when I departed from Macedonia, not one congregation shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except ye only, because also in Thessalonica ye sent both once and again to my need”** (Philippians 4:15-16).

Paul said that even when he was in need there at Corinth he did not burden any of them. Whatever surplus funds he had saved from his wages at other congregations probably did not last very long. And instead of burdening them at Corinth, Paul relied on the support of brothers who came from Macedonia.

And Paul assured them in this letter that he was going to keep himself non-burdensome to them. He did not reveal that information to them so that they would begin providing a wage for him. His reason was no doubt to let them know his work with them was not in any way inferior just because it was given freely.

### His pride about and love for them

- **The truth of Christ is in me that this pride in me will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows** (Second Corinthians 11:10-12).

Remember what Paul said in his first letter to them about his pride (his delight and satisfaction) in his work with the good news of Christ: **“And so the Lord commanded those who proclaim the good news to live from the good news. But I have used none of these things, and I did not write these things so that it should be done to me this way.**

**“For it is good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my boasting empty. 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. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward, but if involuntarily, I have been entrusted with a commission.**

**“What then is my reward? That, while preaching the good news, I may make the good news of the Christ without charge, in order not to make full use of my right in the good news”** (First Corinthians 9:14-18).

Corinth was in the province of Achaia, and Paul obviously determined to preach and teach the good news of Christ there freely without charge. And he said the reason was because he loved them. He lowered himself so that they might be lifted up.

### Boasters who wanted to appear like apostles

- **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** (Second Corinthians 11:10-12).

Paul was going to continue teaching the good news of Christ to them. Those men who were critical of Paul apparently wanted to compete with him and his co-workmen. Apparently they were boasting of being just as authoritative. And they were apparently waiting for an opportunity to impose themselves. Hence, if Paul had not continued teaching the good news to them those men would have taught other things. Things like another Jesus, another spirit, and another good news.

And even now there are many men who claim to be apostles of Christ with all the authority of his apostles. They claim that right because they promote the false idea of apostolic succession. That false idea says that leading men from each generation inherit the right of apostleship, with all of its rights and privileges. Here is part of what the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says about it:

Apostolic succession is the method whereby the ministry of the Christian Church is held to be derived from the apostles by a continuous succession, which has usually been associated with a claim that the succession is through a series of bishops. This series was seen originally as that of the bishops of a particular see founded by one or more of the apostles, but it is generally understood today as meaning a series of bishops, regardless of see, each consecrated by other bishops themselves consecrated similarly in a succession going back to the apostles.

Notice how it is the bishops who empower themselves with that claim. And remember, that office was never created by Christ or his apostles. It was an invention of the aggressive men that Jesus warned about, when he said, **“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).

Paul also warned about them when he said to the elders of the congregation at Ephesus, **“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).

Any man who claims apostolic succession is clearly a grievous wolf to the genuine church of Jesus Christ.

## They are false apostles

- **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).

Paul here exposes those men for what they were: false apostles, deceitful workmen, helpers of Satan. Those were very harsh words and serious accusations against those men. But they were words of truth. Paul was not gentle with those men as he had been with the other disciples there. He was obviously very angry toward those men.

He was angry because he had a jealousy of God toward his brothers there at Corinth. And those false apostles, deceitful workmen, helpers of Satan were a deadly threat to the souls

of those disciples at Corinth. What loving father and mother would not be very angry toward someone who was a threat to the lives of their children? Therefore, Paul spoke very harshly about those men. He warned the Christians there not to be deceived by them. He warned them not to be misled by the pious appearance of those men, because it was a disguise.

Paul said that Satan disguises himself into an agent of light. Satan appears to us, not in any kind of bodily form, but in spirit—in our minds and in our thoughts. We are aware of his presence that way when we think of things that are wrong but give the appearance of being good and right, good and right in the sense of worldly gains and pleasures.

Moreover, Satan appears to us through the men who serve him. Just as Jesus' disciples could see the Spirit of God in him, in his words and actions (see John 14:9), and just as people can see the Spirit of Christ in the words and actions of his faithful disciples, so we can see the spirit of Satan in the words and actions of sinners. We as Christians proudly (with delight and satisfaction) display the Spirit of Christ in us. However, the disciples of Satan conceal his spirit in them. Instead, they disguise themselves as helpers of righteousness. And that describes the men in Corinth that Paul was speaking about.

However, regardless of how successful such men are, Paul said their end will be according to their works. Since their works are evil, their end will be evil, whatever their works may be.

### Paul wanted to boast a little

- **I say again, let not any man think me to be foolish, but if otherwise—even if as foolish—accept me, so that I also may boast some a little** (Second Corinthians 11:16).

Paul did not want any man to think he was foolish, even though he asked them to tolerate a little of his foolishness. A man can do some foolishness without himself being foolish. A man can use foolishness to expose the foolishness of others, which is what Paul wanted to do. For example, Solomon said, **“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit”** (Proverbs 26:5). And that is probably why Paul wanted his brothers at Corinth to tolerate a little of his foolishness. It was an answer to the foolishness of his enemies.

Paul also said to his brothers at Corinth that even if some of them thought he was foolish, he asked them to accept him anyway so that he could boast some a little. Remember, boasting is an expression of pride. And the good kind of pride is a feeling of delight and satisfaction about achievements. And Paul wanted them to know about his achievements.

### His confidence of boast

- **What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of the boast. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast** (Second Corinthians 11:17-18).

Paul is here making clear that he was not speaking according to the Lord; he was not speaking what the Lord had commanded him. He said he was speaking as in foolishness, in his confidence of the boast. He was going to boast according to the flesh, because many others were boasting that way. And no doubt the men who were trying to compete with him there at Corinth were boasting that way, which is what drove Paul for himself to boast according to the flesh.

Now remember, the Bible use of the word flesh can include everything worldly about a man, not just about his body. It includes his knowledge, his occupation, his possessions, his station in life, and everything else about him that is not spiritual.

Paul was such a humble man that he did not want to boast according to the flesh. Remember the passage, **“He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord”** (First Corinthians 1:31). Paul wanted to boast of his relationship with the Lord and the work he was doing for him, and not anything else. And that was why he said his confidence of the boast was not according to the Lord.

However, Paul was not disobeying the Lord by boasting according to the flesh. God has not forbidden us to speak that way. We are under the law of liberty with him, and can use our judgment about such things. When the passage says that we should boast in the Lord, it means he should be our primary boast.

## They even tolerate abuse

- **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** (Second Corinthians 11:19-20).

When Paul said they were wise, he no doubt meant they were wise in their own eyes. He was using irony. For they were actually foolish, genuinely foolish. They thought they were wise, but were actually foolish. They were like the men Paul spoke about in the book of Romans who thought they were wise: **“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 ...”** (Romans 1:21-22).

The Christians at Corinth were not evil like the men Paul spoke about who did not glorify God, but they did seem to think they were wise, when in fact they were foolish. They thought they were wise by tolerating men who were doing all kinds of evil things against them. And Paul named five examples as proof of it. He said they tolerated it if some man

enslaved them  
 devoured them  
 seized them  
 lifted himself up (over them)  
 struck them on the face

Those things that Paul listed may actually have been literal examples. For there are people today who believe in Christ that tolerate all kinds of abuse against them. They are the

extreme pacifists. I saw a horrible example not long ago when an evil man murdered many of the little children of such pacifists while the children were attending school.

Those pacifists not only tolerated that evil against them, but they even forgave the murderer. They have completely misunderstood the commands of Christ about such things. They no doubt think they are wisely doing his will, but the devil has deceived them into foolishly doing his will.

Such delusions about the will of Christ are based primarily on mistranslations and misinterpretations of passages such as these:

**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** (Matthew 5:38-39).

**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** (Matthew 5:43-45).

Remember what I said in my commentary about that first passage. 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.

Also, 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 of such men 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.

Consider this passage from Romans: **“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 13:3-4).

Those who have the authority to punish men who commit evil, and they do it are helpers of God. Fathers and mother are helpers of God when they punish their children who do wrong. Rulers are helpers of God when they punish criminals, punishing them with justice

not tolerance. And the elders of each congregation are helpers of God when they punish abuse among them instead of tolerating it.

Paul never tolerated abuse against him when he had a choice. Remember how he cursed the sorcerer with blindness because of how he was opposing him: **“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”** (Acts 13:8-11).

And what was Paul’s response when the rulers at Philippi sent to release Paul and Silas from jail? The record says, **“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”** (Acts 16:35-39). Paul was no pacifist.

Regarding this passage from the book of Romans: **“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 ...”** (Romans 1:21-22). That certainly describes pagan America. The people have forsaken God, have become vain in their reasonings, and their hearts have become darkened without understanding. They profess to be wise, but have truly become foolish. For they too tolerate abuse against them.

For example, men now commit all kinds of criminal behavior that our judges either excuse with pseudo-punishments like “probation,” or they will send them to prison, knowing that they will only serve a small part of their time there.

I sometimes watch on television what are called “reality” shows about crime. I continually see criminal behavior that deserves the penalty of death, but instead that kind of behavior is tolerated with only slight punishment. People today tolerate the destruction of their possessions by criminals without demanding just recompense. Therefore, lawless is multiplying, and our prisons are overcrowded even when most criminals are not sent there. And yet our foolish people do not understand. Satan has blinded their eyes and led them astray because they have turned away from God.

## Paul too was bold in foolishness

- **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 11:21).

There was genuine irony in what Paul said about being weak. He was actually speaking from satisfaction that he and his co-workmen were too strong in spirit to do such things against them. He used that irony to help those brothers at Corinth to see how foolish they were for tolerating such abuses. And he uses another irony farther in this letter.

Although Paul was “so weak” as not to abuse them that way, nevertheless, in whatever a man might have been bold in foolishness, Paul said that he too was bold. His competitors there were bold in the foolishness of their claims, especially their claims of equal authority with Paul. They were also bold in their abusive treatment of the Christians at Corinth. But Paul was going to be bold in proclaiming the truth about his qualifications and his sufferings for Christ.

## His qualifications

- **Are they Hebrews? I too. Are they Israelites? I too. Are they a seed of Abraham? I too. Are they helpers of Christ? (I speak as being mad) I more: ...** (Second Corinthians 11:22-23).

Apparently his competitors there were Jewish Christians. And they were using their heritage as evidence of their authority. Consequently, Paul compares himself with them. And he used four questions in that comparison:

- Were they Hebrews? He was too.
- Were they Israelites? He was too.
- Were they a seed of Abraham? He was too.
- Were they helpers of Christ? He was more.

The Hebrews had been God’s chosen race. The Israelites had been God’s chosen nation. The seed of Abraham were the heirs of God’s promised blessing. Paul said that he too was a Hebrew, an Israelite, and a seed of Abraham.

Regarding being helpers of Christ, Paul did not claim equality with those men; he claimed superiority. Being a Hebrew, an Israelite, and a seed of Abraham was not a man’s choice; it was an inheritance. And men with that heritage did not differ. One man could not be more of an Israelite than another. However, being a helper of Christ, and how well he served as a helper, was a man’s choice. Paul said he was more of a helper, and he mentioned many things about himself to prove it, which he listed next.

When Paul said he was more of a helper of Christ, he interjected the statement that he was speaking as being mad, or crazy. Paul was such a humble man, that it was very difficult for him to speak that way. That is why he said he spoke as being mad. He was speaking abnormally for him. It was very unlike him, because he was normally such a humble man.

## His many afflictions

- ... in toils, more abundantly; in stripes, countless; in prisons, more frequently; in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I was shipwrecked, I have done a night and a day in the depth ... (Second Corinthians 11:23-26).

As part of Paul's evidence that he was more of a helper in Christ, he listed the many afflictions he had suffered for him:

in toils, more abundantly  
 in stripes, countless  
 in prisons, more frequently  
 in deaths often  
 from the Jews five times receiving forty save one  
 thrice beaten with rods  
 once stoned  
 thrice shipwrecked  
 did a night and a day in the depth

Paul said he worked more abundantly in his toils for Christ. In his first letter to them he compared himself with the other apostles, when he said, **“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 said he labored more abundantly than all of the other apostles. Therefore, he could confidently proclaim that he had certainly toiled more abundantly than those Jewish competitors of him at Corinth.

Regarding stripes, corporal punishment was commonly used both for children and adults until recent times in America, but not the vicious kind portrayed in fiction by the movie business. Corporal punishment is still used in some countries of the world. Paul received corporal punishment by many of those Gentile authorities who were opposed to his evangelistic work. Indeed, he was punished so often with whipping that he said the stripes were countless. The record in the book of acts only mentions a few of those times.

The book of Acts also mentions some of the times he had been cast into prison. It is quite possible that his enemies in the congregation at Corinth had never been cast into prison as helpers of Christ. And if they had, it was much less often than Paul was.

When Paul said he was often in deaths, he was probably speaking about being in such perils that he was near death. Remember what he said at the beginning of this letter: **“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).

When Paul spoke of receiving from the Jews forty save one, he was referring to this law of Moses: **“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 limited the number of stripes to forty. And the reason was to prevent their Israelite brother from being debased to them. However, the Jews reduced the maximum number to thirty-nine to help prevent exceeding the limit of forty. Corporal punishment done properly is an effective way to discourage misbehavior. Our motion picture business has used their imaginary and perverted historical stories to propagandize against all corporal punishment by making it appear cruel and brutal. That is just one example to show how they serve the devil and not God.

Paul said he was thrice beaten with rods. That was a much more severe form of corporal punishment. The record in Acts also tells of a time when Paul and his co-worker Silas were beaten with rods: **“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 ...”** (Acts 16:22-23). That beating was so severe that it created wounds in his flesh that needed washing (see Acts 16:33).

The one time Paul was stoned was when he was thought to be dead because of it. Remember, that was told in this passage: **“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 14:19).

The record in Acts also mentions one time when Paul was shipwrecked. That happened on his way to Rome to be tried before Caesar. The ship he was on was violently storm-tossed for two weeks before it finally ran aground near the shore of the island Malta (see Acts 27).

What Paul probably meant by doing a night and a day in the depth was being adrift in the Mediterranean Sea. That was probably from one of his shipwrecks, although it could have been caused by his enemies casting him into the sea.

What Paul said in this part of his second letter to the Corinthians indicates there were many things he did and suffered that are not recorded in the Bible.

### His many perils

- **... in frequent journeys, in perils of flowing waters, in perils of bandits, in perils from my race, in perils from Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils at sea, in perils among false brothers ...** (Second Corinthians 11:26).

Paul here lists many of the perils he faced as further evidence of how much he suffered as a helper in Christ:

- in frequent journeys
- in perils of flowing waters
- in perils of bandits
- in perils from his race
- in perils from Gentiles
- in perils in the city
- in perils in the wilderness
- in perils at sea
- in perils among false brothers

In his list of perils Paul first mentions his frequent journeys. Travel is always perilous to some degree, even in modern times, especially automobile travel. And travel was much more perilous during those ancient times. Even travel on the small sea of Galilee was perilous. That lake is only thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. Yet the record tells how the apostles had been in danger of perishing in a boat there: **“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”** (Matthew 8:23-25).

Moving water can be a very powerful force. Flowing waters commonly come from swollen rivers and flash-floods. And during his frequent journeys Paul must have experienced many of those.

Even in modern times bandits are a danger, especially during journeys. Being in lawless places makes men much more susceptible to attack by bandits. And with the growing spiritual degeneracy in pagan America such places are becoming more numerous. Paul faced much more danger from bandits because of his frequent journeys. It was easier during those times for bandits to ambush their victims on the roads.

The book of Acts mentions many times when Paul was attacked by members of his race, the Jews. They were a frequent peril to him. Indeed, they were a greater threat to him than the Romans were. Remember, it was the Jews who persuaded the crowds at Lystra to stone Paul such that he was presumed to be dead (Acts 14:19).

Paul was also in perils from Gentiles, because he taught the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. Here is one example: **“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.**

**“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”** (Acts 19:23-30).

Paul also mentioned facing perils in the city, in the wilderness, and in the sea. Therefore, just about everywhere he went he faced perils. He did not live a life of safety and security. Simply being very active exposes a man to more perils. And Paul was very active in his work for our Lord Christ.

And since his activities involved promoting the good news of Christ, that meant he was even less safe and secure. He was less safe because the early church was subject to much violent opposition, and especially toward men like Paul who were promoting it.

Finally Paul said he was in perils among false brothers. The very fact that he was forced to defend himself to the congregation at Corinth with a little of his “foolishness” is one example of the perils he faced among false brothers.

His letter to the congregations at Galatia is primarily about combating the influence of false brothers there. Those false brothers were not only a threat to the Christians there, but they were a threat to Paul himself. For he said in that letter, **“So then have I become your enemy telling you the truth? They are zealous for you but not honorably. They want to exclude you, so that ye may be zealous for them”** (Galatians 4:16-17).

## His toil, hardship, and many deprivations

- **... in toil and hardship, in frequent sleeplessness, in hunger and thirst, in frequent fasts, in cold and nakedness** (Second Corinthians 11:27).

In addition to facing all those perils in his service to Christ, Paul also suffered in  
 toil and hardship  
 frequent sleeplessness  
 hunger and thirst  
 frequent fasts  
 cold and nakedness

Toil means to work hard and continuously. And toil always causes discomfort and weariness to our bodies, not pleasure. Normally when we toil at least we can get some rest when we sleep. For Solomon said, **“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the fullness of the rich will not allow him to sleep”** (Ecclesiastes 5:12). However, Paul was deprived of much rest because he had to endure frequent sleeplessness.

Like the word affliction, the word hardship covers a large range of things. And hardships are always a burden to us, especially when the hardships are associated with our toils.

Paul also said he experienced hunger and thirst, besides his frequent fasts. Fasting was commonly done in ancient Israel. Indeed, the law of Moses required the entire nation to fast for one full day each year on the day of atonement. Here is that law: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, However on the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of**

atonement. It shall be a holy convocation to you, and ye shall afflict your souls, and ye shall offer an offering made by fire to Jehovah.

“And ye shall do no manner of work in that same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before Jehovah your God. For whatever soul it be who shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from his people.

“And whatever soul it be who does any manner of work in that same day, that soul I will destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and ye shall afflict your souls. In the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, ye shall keep your sabbath” (Leviticus 23:26-32).

Three times in that law Jehovah commanded them to afflict their souls. That meant they were to refrain from eating; they were to fast. However, many of the Jews would fast at other times as well. Their fasting may have involved a single meal, or it could have involved several days. Remember how Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness.

Paul said he had frequent fasts. Fasting was also commonly done during times of special prayer. That was what the congregation at Antioch did when the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the special work of taking the good news of Christ to the Gentile nations. The record says about the disciples there, “**Then, having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away**” (Acts 13:3).

Fasting is rarely done during these modern times. I have hear many appeals for prayer about various things, but never an appeal for fasting. About the only time people now fast is when they are trying to lose some of the excess fat on their bodies cause by their over-eating.

Paul also suffered in cold and nakedness. Suffering in cold meant he was without adequate shelter. Having to endure nakedness was no doubt a result of attacks by his persecutors. It may also have been part of being cast into prisons. It was common in those days to strip captives of their clothing to keep them more passive (see Second Chronicles 28:8-15 for an example).

## His daily care for the congregations

- **Besides the external things, crowding upon me daily is the care of all the congregations** (Second Corinthians 11:28).

Paul loved his fellow disciples of Christ. He was strongly attached emotionally to them all, especially the one's he had brought to Christ. Remember how he referred to the Christians at Corinth as his beloved children: “**I do not write these things shaming you, but I warn you as my beloved children**” (First Corinthians 4:14). It was therefore natural for him to be concerned about them every day. What righteous father is not concerned about his children every day, especially when he is away from them?

There is a big difference between being anxious about something and being concerned about it or having care about it. Jesus commanded us not to be anxious about our lives: “**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?”** (Matthew 6:25). And Paul commanded us to be anxious about nothing: **“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God”** (Philippians 4:6).

Remember, anxiety is a kind of fear or foreboding about the future that involves a paralyzing doubt. Care and concern also involve a kind of fear and feeling of uncertainty about the future, but not the paralyzing kind. Care and concern motivate us to act or prepare to act against whatever might threaten who or what we care about. A responsible captain has a healthy care about his ship, righteous fathers and mothers have a healthy care about their children, and Paul had daily care about all of the congregations he had established.

### When Paul is made fiery

- **Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I am not made fiery?** (Second Corinthians 11:29).

People who are very emotionally attached to each other commonly share what happens to them. Husbands and wives both hurt when one of them hurts. Righteous fathers and mothers hurt when any of their children hurt. And it is depressing to us when anyone we love is weakened. Therefore, Paul wanted the disciples at Corinth to know that whenever any one of them became weak, he was made weak.

Regarding fire, that activity is a force, and it can be a consuming force. Emotions are also forces, and they too can become consuming forces. Paul was using the word fiery to symbolize his strong emotion of anger. The more popular word now is hot. When a man is made hot in the figurative sense he has a strong emotion of anger. Paul was aroused with a strong emotion of anger whenever any one of those who were his spiritual children was caused to stumble.

Paul's anger could have become a consuming force by using his words against the cause of stumbling. Words can be a consuming force, because Solomon said, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue ...”** (Proverbs 18:21). And Isaiah said about Jehovah, **“Behold, the name of Jehovah comes from far, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is as a devouring fire ...”** (Isaiah 30:27).

Paul was made weak when they were weak; he was made weak because of his love for them. And when they were caused to stumble he was made fiery (hot with anger) because of his love for them.

### Boasting of things of his weakness

- **If it is necessary to boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, he who is blessed into the ages, knows that I do not lie. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes wanting to apprehend me. And I was lowered in a hamper through a window through the wall, and escaped his hands** (Second Corinthians 11:30-33).

Notice how Paul spoke of the necessity of boasting. Paul did not like to boast, but the attacks by his adversaries there made it necessary for him. However, Paul also boasted of the things of his weakness. That was surely not what his adversaries would have done. Indeed, have you ever heard any other man boast of his weakness? I have not.

Paul first praised the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, saying that he was blessed into the ages. Regardless of the many things Paul suffered in his service to Christ, he never once accused God, or even questioned why he was suffering.

Paul used God as a witness for him that he did not lie. He wanted the disciples in Corinth to know that the things he was saying were all true. He needed to assure them of that because of the visions and revelations of the Lord he was going to describe for them.

However, Paul first described how he was persecuted even from the beginning of his ministry. He told how the governor of the city of Damascus sought to arrest him. Remember, it was there that Paul became a Christian and began preaching the good news of Christ. The record says, **“But Saul was strengthened more, and was confounding the Jews who dwell at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ. 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”** (Acts 9:22-24).

The reason the governor of the city wanted to apprehend him was no doubt caused by the the Jews’ vigorous opposition to him. However, Paul did not obey the governor, but instead, with the help of the other disciples there, he fled the city to escape. And that persecution certainly was one of the things of his weakness, because it weakened his efforts to evangelize at Damascus.

## Boasting to me is not helpful

- **(Really, to me boasting is not helpful)** (Second Corinthians 12:1).

Paul did not say boasting was not helpful. He said to him it was not helpful. And he made that remark in the middle of his boasting. What he probably meant was that for him he much preferred to let others boast about him, and not himself. For Solomon said, **“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth, a stranger, and not thine own lips”** (Proverbs 27:2).

Paul was compelled to boast of himself in order to defend himself against his enemies there, and to combat their false teachings. For he said a little farther, **“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”** (Second Corinthians 12:11).

## Visions and revelations

- **For I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in body, I know not, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) such a man was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in body, or whether outside**

**the body, I know not, God knows) that he was caught up into the paradise, and heard inexpressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter** (Second Corinthians 12:1-4).

Paul's description of visions and revelations is no doubt the main reason why the disciples needed to be assured that he was speaking the truth. He first told about a man who was caught up as far as the third heaven. The first heaven is our atmosphere; the second heaven is the outer space of the universe; the third heaven is the spiritual realm where God and his celestial agents dwell. Each one of those heavens is greater than the other.

Paul did not know whether the man was caught up in his spirit (outside the body) or whether his body was also caught up. And he said that twice in this passage. He may have said those words twice to emphasize how little he knew about that vision.

Paul knew the man was a Christian, and that it happened fourteen years before he wrote those words. He knew the man was caught up into the paradise, which was as far as the third heaven. That paradise was where Jesus went immediately after he died upon the cross. For remember what Jesus said to one of the malefactors who were being crucified with him. When the man defended him, Jesus said to him: **“Truly I say to thee, today thou will be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:43).

The only other time the paradise is mentioned is in the book of Revelation. Jesus spoke of it when he appeared from heaven in his glory to the apostle John and gave him messages for the seven agents of the seven congregations. The last thing Jesus said to the congregation at Ephesus, was, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations. To him who overcomes, I will give him to eat from the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of my God”** (Revelation 2:7). And that is all we know about the paradise of God.

Paul also said that when the man was caught up into the paradise, he **“heard inexpressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter.”** The apostle John was also caught up into the third heaven (whether in body or outside the body is not told). And he saw and heard things, most of which were indescribable except in very figurative language. John was allowed to write about what he saw and heard so we could learn from them, the descriptions of which he recorded in the book of Revelation.

Nevertheless, John did not write about the paradise there. Perhaps things in the paradise are inexpressible in human language. Therefore, no man is permitted to utter them. That would prevent gross distortions and misrepresentations about such things that would result from any descriptions attempted in human language.

## Would not boast except in his weakness

- **For such a man I will boast, but for myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses. 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** (Second Corinthians 12:5-6).

Paul said he would boast for such a man, but he would not boast for himself, except in his weaknesses. He also said that if he wanted to boast (about himself), he would not be fool-

ish, for he would speak the truth, but he refrained boasting. He said he refrained boasting because he did not want any man to reckon to him above what he saw of him or heard anything from him.

I believe what Paul was referring to here, about not boasting for himself, was with reference to being caught up into the paradise of the third heaven. I believe that, because what Paul said suggests to me that he was the man who was caught up into the paradise of the third heaven. But Paul was such a humble man that he would not boast about it. Nevertheless, because Paul did not say he was the man, then we do not have the right to say he was. All we can do is conjecture and admit it is conjecture.

If Paul would not boast for himself, in order to prevent any man from reckoning to him above what he saw of him or heard anything from him, then how can we boast that way of ourselves. Paul did boast about himself, but it was not to cause any man to think too highly of him, to reckon to him above what he deserved. He only wanted to be reckoned according to what he did and said.

And although it is permitted for us to boast, we should always seek to prevent any man from reckoning above what we deserve. And as Paul desired for himself, what we deserve should be based upon the things we do and say. It is not right to reckon to people what we or others imagine about them. God judges us by what we do and say, and that is how we should judge each other.

When Paul said he would boast for the man who was taken up to the paradise but he would not boast for himself, he was referring to extraordinary experiences like that. If he boasted about such things it would not have accomplished anything. Boasting about such experiences would only have risked causing someone to reckon to him above what he saw Paul do and say. When Paul did boast, it was either to teach a lesson or to defend himself against his enemies.

Rather than boast about such experiences for himself, Paul said he would boast about his weaknesses. Paul was not only an extraordinarily humble man, but he was also a man with an extraordinary faith in, and love for his Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, he would boast about his weaknesses. He would boast about his weaknesses because the Lord said that his power is made fully perfect in weakness. Paul speaks about that next.

## Paul's thorn in the flesh

- **And so that I might not be over exalted by the extraordinariness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, an agent of Satan so that he would buffet me, so that I would not be over exalted** (Second Corinthians 12:7).

We know not all of the revelations from the Lord that Paul received. However, we can see the results of many of those revelations from the books that he wrote, because he wrote almost one-third of the text of the New Testament. And those books are filled with new knowledge about God and his will for us, knowledge that cannot be found in the Old Testament. And the new knowledge that Paul contributed was from revelations given him by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And for that very reason Paul was given a thorn in the flesh. His use of the expression thorn in the flesh was, of course, figurative. It symbolized something that was a continual source of irritation to him. He never described what that thorn in the flesh was. However, I personally believe it was poor vision.

There are several things in his books to suggest he had poor vision. For example, he told of having other men transcribe his books. And when he did write something it was with large letters, as he said to the congregations at Galatia: **“See in how large letters I wrote to you with my hand”** (Galatians 6:11).

I also believe the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to describe what his thorn in the flesh was. Otherwise, foolish men would have glorified whatever it was. And no doubt some of them would even have afflicted themselves with the same thing, thinking it would make them more like Paul. Therefore, it is better if we do not know what his thorn in the flesh was.

Paul said that his thorn in the flesh was an agent of Satan so that he would buffet him. The book of Job tells how God allowed Satan to afflict Job. Satan challenged Jehovah’s claim that Job was a righteous man, saying that if Job lost all his possessions he would curse God to his face. However, when that happened Job remained righteous.

The record then says, **“And Jehovah said to Satan, Have thou considered my servant Job? For there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although thou moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.**

**“And Satan answered Jehovah, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face. And Jehovah said to Satan, Behold, he is in thy hand, only spare his life.**

**“So Satan went forth from the presence of Jehovah, and smote Job with severe boils from the sole of his foot to his crown. And he took a potsherd for him to scrape himself with it, and he sat among the ashes”** (Job 2:3-8). Job remained righteous even then.

God had a great purpose in allowing Satan to afflict Job. For we now have that story in the Bible to encourage us when we suffer. Of course, Paul’s thorn in the flesh was not near as severe as the one of Job. Nevertheless, it was sent by Satan with God’s permission.

God allowed that agent of Satan to give Paul a thorn in the flesh to buffet him because God had a great purpose. And that purpose was to keep Paul from being over exalted because of the extraordinariness of his revelations. Moreover, Paul tells next how that thorn in the flesh helped make the power of God more fully perfect in him

### God’s power is made perfect in weakness

- **I besought the Lord thrice about this, that it might depart from me. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made fully perfect in weakness** (Second Corinthians 12:8-9).

Although Paul’s thorn in the flesh was not as severe as that of Job’s, nevertheless, it was severe enough to cause him to beseech the Lord that it might depart from him. Paul

besought him three times. However, after the third time the Lord told Paul that his grace was sufficient for him.

When God does not answer specific requests that we make repeatedly it may mean his grace is sufficient about it. Therefore, do not become discouraged when he does not answer that way. For he may have judged that what we already have or are receiving is all we need, and anything more would not be good.

Few people realize that too many blessings (too many as God judges) can actually be detrimental. They can expose us to more temptations; they can distract us from important things; they can actually become a burden; they can make us proud.

Nevertheless, always use wisdom to decide when to stop appealing to God about something. Remember the parable Jesus told about the widow and the judge: **“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 18:2-8).

God also explained how Paul’s affliction was actually helping him. It made him weaker, and God said that his power was made fully perfect in weakness. The best example of God’s power made fully perfect in weakness is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only begotten Son of God. Yet God sent him to be born in this world to live in weakness. Although Jesus was the very Son of God, he lived his life as a poor man without worldly authority, wealth, or glory and honor. He lived his life in poverty and obscurity, and he was crucified as a criminal.

Yet it was through that weakness that Jesus (1) demonstrated that sin is not inevitable, thus defeating that argument of God’s enemies, (2) he earned the right to redeem our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins, and (3) he proved his spiritual superiority, showing his worthiness to take his place at the right side of God in heaven as Lord over all things.

It was his earthly weakness that enabled him to defeat sin and the devil. If Jesus had not lived as a poor man among us, being rejected by the world, he could not have achieved those things. Jesus was made fully perfect in weakness. I explain that more fully in my books *The Law of God Before And After Christ* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Therefore, if there is unavoidable weakness in your life, consider how it may be making the power of God more perfect in you. Always trust God and love him, whatever happens in your life.

## Paul then boasted in his weaknesses

- **More gladly therefore I will boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of the Christ may reside in me. Therefore I am pleased in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in restrictions, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong** (Second Corinthians 12:9-10).

Paul is a great example for us to not only accept (unavoidable) weaknesses, but also to boast in them. For they made him strong in the power of Christ. Indeed, he said that he was pleased in

weaknesses  
injuries  
necessities  
persecutions  
restrictions

Our weaknesses commonly refer to physical infirmities. Injuries cause pain and contribute to weakness. What Paul meant by necessities probably included the lack of food and shelter, as well as the finances he needed to continue his work. Paul suffered persecutions in many ways. And he had to endure restrictions from his enemies in how and where he could evangelize. Remember how he was driven out of many places.

Enduring unavoidable weaknesses, injuries, necessities, persecutions, and restrictions can be a good thing if it is for a good purpose. Remember the modern proverb of athletes: “No pain, no gain.” Therefore, Paul was pleased in those things, not for his sake, but for the sake of Christ.

Paul also trusted the Lord’s response to him that his power was made fully perfect in weakness. As Paul said, **“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”** When Paul was weak because of weaknesses, injuries, necessities, persecutions, and restrictions, then somehow he was strong.

I am suffering from a worsening hearing handicap. My loss of hearing is partly caused by severe tinnitus, which is a loud screaming noise in my ears that never goes away, day or night. It almost sounds like an agent of Satan is endlessly screaming in my ears. But I cannot say that, because the Lord has not spoken to me as he did to Paul. The Lord no longer speaks to any man as he did to his apostles.

My hearing loss has greatly weakened my ability to interact with people both in person and by telephone. Therefore, following in the steps of Paul, I too will boast of that weakness, so that the power of the Christ is made fully perfect and will reside in me. It is not easy to be pleased with such things, but we have the example of great men of God like Paul for us.

Therefore, like Paul, I also trust the Lord that when I am weak, then somehow I am strong. Perhaps the isolation caused by my poor ability to interact with people verbally, is giving me more time to spend in my writings, undistracted. And that is making me stronger in my labors to bear fruit for the Lord in books instead of in person.

Remember however, we should seek to overcome weaknesses unless they are unavoidable. We should seek to have our infirmities healed and overcome, if that is possible. Be

not foolish and seek or accept weaknesses unnecessarily. Let God decide which ones he wants us to have, such as my incurable hearing handicap. But even then, I wear hearing aides so that my handicap is not too debilitating. Do not foolishly add to your weaknesses. Remember what Paul said to Timothy about his weaknesses: **“No longer drink water, but use a little wine because of thy stomach and thy frequent weaknesses”** (First Timothy 5:23).

## The Corinthians compelled him to boast

- **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** (Second Corinthians 12:11).

The reason for Paul’s boasting was to assure his brothers at Corinth that he came short in nothing to those men. And since his Christian brothers there did not defend him, Paul was compelled to be foolish and boast of himself. His boasting was not a result of arrogant pride. His boasting was simply to express facts about his achievements.

He said his boasting was foolish because he did not want to proclaim those things himself. Instead, his Christian brothers should have commended Paul so that he would not need to commend himself. Remember, Solomon said, **“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth, a stranger, and not thine own lips”** (Proverbs 27:2). Paul only boasted that way because they compelled him.

Those false apostles had boasted of themselves that they were not only apostles but better ones than Paul. Remember how one of them scoffed at Paul’s speech and his appearance. Therefore, he used the expressions, **“superlative apostles”** and **“I am nothing”** to expose them and reveal the irony of their claims.

It was irony because in fact, compared with them, Paul could even be nothing and still not come short of them. He would not come short of them because they were less than nothing. Those false apostles were less than nothing because they ranked in a negative status regarding the genuine good news of Christ, being enemies of it.

## The signs of the apostle

- **Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty works** (Second Corinthians 12:12).

Notice how Paul said the signs of the apostle were (1) signs, (2) wonders, and (3) mighty works. No man who came after Peter and Paul and the other apostles who were chosen by Christ can do any of those things. Every man who ever claimed to be an apostle of Christ after them was a liar and a fraud.

There is nothing in the Bible record to support the false doctrine of apostolic succession. Remember, that doctrine was created by the same kind of aggressive men that Jesus spoke about when he warned, **“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 only in the sense that they create ways to control those who believe in Christ. Ever since the beginning aggressive men have striven to gain control and set themselves up over others. And it is sad but true that most people want it that way.

The doctrine of apostolic succession is only one device they use. A more prevalent method is to establish one man in every congregation to be the preacher, pastor, or priest. Of course, not every man in that capacity is an aggressor, but aggressors are the men who created that long standing tradition.

Paul said he performed those signs of an apostle to them in all perseverance. The signs of an apostle included the ability to heal the sick, cure the handicapped, cast out demons, and speak in tongues. Those signs even included the ability to raise the dead; remember the example of Dorcas (see Acts 9:36-41). Other Christians had some of those powers (special gifts of the Holy Spirit), but only the apostles had the ability to share those powers, which was done by the laying on of their hands.

The following story tells how the apostles were the only men able to share those supernatural powers: **“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.**

**“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.**

**“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.**

**“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.**

**“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 are 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 8:6-24).**

And the following story tells how Paul had that ability to share those supernatural powers: **“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. 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 19:1-7).

Paul said those signs were performed among them with all perseverance. The record does not describe the signs that he did at Corinth, but it does describe them while Paul was at Ephesus: **“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).

Therefore, believe not the many false claims that are made about those powers. The most common one is no doubt the ability to speak in tongues. It is commonly claimed because it is easy to fake and rarely challenged. No man has or every has had any supernatural powers after the time of the apostles. All such claims are deceit. Beware of them, because men are very clever to give the impression they do have them. But careful scrutiny always exposes them as frauds.

## Paul was not burdensome to them

- **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** (Second Corinthians 12:13).

From that question, it appears the congregation at Corinth thought they were inferior to the other congregations. And Paul wanted to know exactly what there was to cause them to think that way. Perhaps they thought Paul was treating them as inferior because he needed to rebuke them in his first letter.

He had already told them that **“the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty works.”** They had been treated like every other congregation, including being blessed with those signs and wonders and mighty works. The only difference was that Paul was not burdensome to them; they were not required to help support him.

Paul’s request to be forgiven that wrong was another irony. For in fact it was not a wrong at all; it was a blessing to them. Instead of treating them in an inferior way, he was treating them in a special way. He was benefitting them. Nevertheless, that favor was not because of partiality, it was no doubt because they needed it. And one of the reasons they needed it may have been because of his adversaries there. Those adversaries would no doubt have

used any burden he placed on them to accuse him falsely, because slander is a major device of the devil and his disciples.

It was not as if they were so poor that they could not afford to help support him. For remember how they had purposed to contribute to the service of the sanctified in Jerusalem. Remember what Paul told them about that charity: **“And in this I give judgment, for this is expedient for you who earlier began, from a year ago, not only the doing but also the intending. And now also finish the doing, so that just as was the willingness of the intending, so also to finish from the having. For if the willingness is present, it is acceptable to the extent if some man has, not to the extent he does not have”** (Second Corinthians 8:10-12).

### Paul would gladly spend for their souls

- **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** (Second Corinthians 12:14).

Although the above passage tells how Paul was planning to visit Corinth a third time, the Bible record only describes two trips. Nevertheless, he assured the disciples there that he would still not be burdensome to them. He also assured them he sought nothing that belonged to them. It was their souls that he sought. He sought them because they were his children in the Lord.

It is a virtue when parents save for their children and not vice versa. Indeed, it almost seems to be human nature for parents to save that way, because most of them do. In America there are many financial plans designed to help parents save for things like their children's education and their marriages. Paul applied those things to his relationship with the disciples at Corinth.

### Even if the more he loved the worse he was loved

- **I most gladly will spend, and will be spent for your souls. Even though more earnestly loving you, the worse I am loved. But let it be. I did not burden you** (Second Corinthians 12:15-16).

Paul was so completely devoted to his spiritual children, the souls that he brought to Christ, that he was even willing to most gladly spend and be spent for their souls. Paul was spending himself for them. He was spending his time and his labors for their eternal spirits. Paul was spending in the sense of taking from the time and the energy that he had remaining in his life and giving it to them. He even took pleasure in doing it because they were his spiritual children.

Moreover, Paul would most gladly spend and be spent for their souls even if the more earnestly loving them, the worse he was loved. That is the kind of love that God has for mankind. He created us and he continually sustains us. Yet history has shown that the more he blesses the world, the less the world loves him. Nevertheless, he still loves us and continues to bless us. God vents his wrath only in response to the growth of sin and wickedness.

When Paul said let it be, that means he was resigned to whatever happened. Regardless of how they loved him, he would not burden them. He was going to continue to sacrifice in that special way for them. And he was no doubt going to continue until his enemies there were defeated. He would continue until the congregation had developed the spiritual strength to defeat those enemies themselves.

### He never exploited them

- **Nevertheless, being clever, I caught you with bait. Any man of whom I have sent to you, did I exploit you through him? I encouraged Titus, and I sent the brother with him. Did Titus exploit you in anything? Did we not walk in the same spirit, not in the same steps?** (Second Corinthians 12:16-18).

Bait is used to lure and entice. And it is virtually always used to catch, harm, or exploit. That may have been another false accusation made against Paul by his adversaries there, those so called “superlative apostles.” Nevertheless, whoever was the source of that accusation, they gave him credit for being clever. But they also said his motives were ulterior, because he wanted to exploit them. His adversaries also accused Paul of being indirect in how he exploited the Corinthians, even doing it by the men he sent to them.

In response Paul used questions to ask the disciples there to examine the facts. He wanted them to investigate to see if there was any evidence that Titus or the brother sent with him, or any other man that Paul sent to them had exploited them in anything.

Slander is best defeated with truth, just as gossip is best defeated with exposure. Therefore, Paul wanted them to seek the truth of the matter, not just ignore the accusation. False accusers are not defeated by ignoring them and their accusations. Moreover, failing to expose them is cowardly.

Paul assured his brothers at Corinth that he and his co-workmen walked in the same spirit. They were no more exploiters than he was. They had the same kind of love for them that he had. They had the same kind of zeal and commitment for them that he had. They also walked in the same steps that he did. Their work with them was the same kind of work for the same purpose that his was. Their behavior with them was just as honorable as his was.

### They were speaking in Christ

- **Do ye think that all this time we are defending ourselves to you? In the sight of God we speak in Christ** (Second Corinthians 12:19).

Paul asked them if they thought that he and his co-workmen were merely justifying themselves. No doubt those false apostles among them were merely justifying themselves. They were guilty of selfish ambition. They were striving to promote themselves.

In a letter to the Philippians brothers Paul spoke of such men at a time when he was in bondage: **“Some indeed proclaim the Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to bring affliction to my bonds”** (Philippians 1:16).

Paul and his co-workmen were not defending or justifying themselves; they were speaking in Christ in the sight of God. They were speaking in behalf of Christ as ambassadors of

him. And they were doing it in the sight of God with his full support. And the evidence of that were the signs and wonders and mighty works they had performed among them.

## All things were for their edification

- **But all things, beloved, are for your edification** (Second Corinthians 12:19).

An edifice is a building, especially a large imposing one. And edification means to be elevated and uplifted. Edification is a blessing. And Paul said that all things were for their edification. Also remember what Paul said to the congregation at Rome: **“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). And that even includes our afflictions and tribulations.

You see, God has so created the world that all things work together for good to those who love him. That is guaranteed, because before God ever created the world he designed it so that all things would work together for our good and for our edification. Even our tribulations do that. Both his natural laws and the spiritual laws somehow work together that way. They even work together for evil to those who hate God. I explain much more about those things in my books *King Solomon’s Advice for the World* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Not being found as wanted

- **For I fear lest somehow, having come, I may find you not such as I want, and I may be found by you such as ye do not want. Lest somehow there be strifes, envyings, wraths, selfish ambitions, slanderings, whisperings, puffings up, turmoils** (Second Corinthians 12:20).

Earlier in this letter Paul said to them, **“Great is my boldness toward you, great is my pride for you. I have been filled with encouragement. I over-abound with joy in all our affliction. For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had not one relief, but being oppressed in everything: battles outside, fears within.**

**“Nevertheless God, who encourages the lowly, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. And not only by his presence, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged by you, reporting to us your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more”** (Second Corinthians 7:4-7).

But now Paul said he feared lest somehow he and they would not be found as they wanted each other. He feared lest **“somehow there be strifes, envyings, wraths, selfish ambitions, slanderings, whisperings, puffings up, turmoils.”** Why Paul expressed those fears may have been because after he left them he heard too many things about them that needed rebuking. And even though he later heard from Titus that they had repented and corrected those things, he feared they might have regressed again after Titus came back to Paul.

They had earlier shown stability toward the good news Christ, and Paul was fearful that instability might have returned. Spiritual failures, even when they are repented, undermine the credibility of the guilty. And it takes time and evidence of good behavior to help

rebuild credibility. And when Paul expressed his fears about them, it was a kind of warning to them not to regress again.

Remember, Paul told how he would not come again to them in sadness: **“But I determined this in myself, not to come again to you in sadness. For if I make you sad, who then is he who makes me glad except he who is made sad by me? And I wrote this same thing to you, so that when I came, I would not have sadness from whom I ought to rejoice, having been confident toward you all, because my joy is of all of you”** (Second Corinthians 2:1-3). Hence, his expression of those fears was a way to warning them to be sure they remained faithful.

What the Corinthians wanted Paul to be is not told. What people want in those who lead them varies according to the times and places. We can only hope that those ancient Christians at Corinth were hoping the right things about Paul. For too many who claim faith in Christ want things in their leaders that are not what God wants.

For example, most believers are like the ancient Israelites who wanted a king. The prophet Samuel warned them about how burdensome a king would be to them. Here is how they responded to his warning: **“But the people refused to hearken to the voice of Samuel. And they said, No, but we will have a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles”** (First Samuel 8:19-20).

Those ancient Israelites wanted a king to judge them and do the work of fighting their battles. And most people who claim to believe in Christ want a man over them—a minister/pastor/priest—to make the decisions about their spiritual lives, and do the work of the church for them.

Nevertheless, regardless of what those Christians at Corinth wanted Paul to be, there is no doubt what Paul wanted them to be. He wanted them to be the way the Lord wants all of his children to be. He wants us to love each other, live righteously, bear good fruit for him, and be united together in the service of his kingdom. The Bible is filled with descriptions of what the Lord wants us to be, especially in the teachings of the good news of Christ.

What Paul did not want to find in them were

strifes  
 envyings  
 wraths  
 selfish ambitions  
 slanderings  
 whisperings  
 puffings up  
 turmoils.

Strifes involve any kind of quarreling. Envyings means wanting what belongs to someone else, whatever it may be. Wraths involve feelings of anger, which often produce hostile behavior. Selfish ambitions refer to a man striving to promote himself regardless of others. Slanderings involve making false accusations.

Whisperings refer to gossip, which is alas widely practiced even among those who claim to believe in Christ. It is popular because people enjoy it. As Solomon said, **“The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts”**

(Proverbs 18:8 and 26:22). Gossip seems innocent and harmless, but it is in fact deadly. Solomon said these things about people who gossip: **“A perverse man scatters abroad strife, and a whisperer separates chief friends”** (Proverbs 16:28), and, **“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention ceases”** (Proverbs 26:20). The Bible never says anything good about gossip.

Puffings up refers to arrogance. A modern expression of being puffed up is having a swelled head. The words puffings up are used because such men puff themselves up in the sense of exaggerating themselves. It is an attitude about themselves that is unrealistic. They imagine themselves to be of much greater worth than they actually are.

That attitude is condemned throughout the Bible. Solomon warned about it, when he said, **“Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18). Satan is the king of such men. For God said to Job about him, **“He beholds everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34).

Finally, Paul mentioned turmoils. Turmoils are a consequence of all those other vices. Turmoils can involve many different kinds of activities, but they are always evil and destructive. Only wicked men rejoice in turmoils, the turmoils of other people.

That list Paul gave was just a sample of the many vices of the world. It was not meant to be exclusive. Indeed, I doubt it possible to list all the vices and potential vices of the world. For men are continually finding ways to commit evil and sin against God.

## Bewailing the unrepentant

- **Lest having come again my God will make me low toward you, and I will bewail many of those who have sinned previously, and who did not repent from the trash and fornication and licentiousness that they committed** (Second Corinthians 12:21).

Paul said he was fearful that God would make him low toward the disciples at Corinth, if he found them not such as he wanted. And he was warning them again not to regress away from the good news of Christ. He did not want to bewail many of them because of their unrepentant sins. He did not want his God to make him low toward them.

Bewailing the failures of those we love is very depressing and downcasting; it is the opposite of being uplifted by their successes. Becoming downcast is especially true when we have worked so hard to improve them. For their failure was his failure, in the sense that his labors for them failed. But that would only be if they had been sinning.

Moreover, God would also make Paul have lower love and regard toward them. As you can see in his letters to them, Paul had much love and high regard for those disciples. Nevertheless, if he found them with **“strifes, envyings, wraths, selfish ambitions, slanderings, whisperings, puffings up, turmoils,”** then they would not deserve such high love and regard.

God would make Paul be lower toward them that way because they would not deserve Paul’s higher love and regard. Instead of showing his great love and regard for them, Paul would **“bewail many of those who have sinned previously, and who did not repent from the trash and fornication and licentiousness that they committed.”**

## His third visit with them

- **This third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two witnesses or three every saying will be confirmed** (Second Corinthians 13:1).

No doubt what Paul meant by every saying, was every accusation. And our Lord Christ commanded that every accusation be established or confirmed at the mouth of two or three witnesses, because he said to his disciples, **“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. But if he is also heedless of the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the tax collector”** (Matthew 18:15-17).

The law of Moses required two or three witnesses before a man could be charged with a crime: **“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). That indicates the Lord considers accusations to be very serious. Therefore, they must be confirmed by more than one witness. Our legal system has created much injustice by accepting only one witness.

## A warning of punishment

- **I have told you before, and I say in advance, as present the second time, and now absent, I write to those who have previously sinned, and to all the others, that if I come to it again, I will not spare, since ye seek proof of the Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but is mighty in you** (Second Corinthians 13:2-3).

With those words Paul emphasized that he would not tolerate sin among them; he would not spare the guilty. What he probably meant by **“those who have previously sinned”** were those who were guilty of sin but had not repented of it. For remember how he said he would **“bemoan many of those who have sinned previously, and who did not repent.”** Remember, forgiveness requires repentance. And genuine repentance involves confession, turning away from the sin, and making retribution.

Paul said he was writing (1) **“to those who had previously sinned,”** and (2) **“to all the others.”** By **“all the others”** he no doubt meant the disciples at Corinth who were not guilty of sin. All of the Christians at Corinth needed to hear that warning. He had warned them before when he was with them, and in this letter he was warning them again while absent.

And we all need to be reminded that God will not spare those who sin and do not repent of it; repent genuinely, bearing fruit worthy of repentance, and not just quit sinning. As John the immerser said to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his immersion, **“Ye offspring of vipers, who showed you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance”** (Matthew 3:7-8).

Paul also said he would use that occasion to give proof of the Christ speaking in him. He said they sought such proof, and he would give it to them. He said he would not spare the unrepentant. But how he would punish them is not told. However, since he said it would give them proof that the Christ was speaking in him, that punishment must have involved some kind of supernatural effect.

Remember how Paul punished the sorcerer who was opposing him: **“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”** (Acts 13:8-11).

Paul also told the Corinthians that Christ was not weak toward them, but was mighty in them. The world thinks that Christ is weak. And while he was upon the earth he was weak in the eyes of the world. Jesus was seen as weak because he was a poor obscure man who lived in a small, poor insignificant country, and he was crucified as a criminal. Moreover, Jesus continues to allow the world to rebel against him, which the world thinks is weakness.

Nevertheless, toward us, those who belong to him, he is not weak. He is mighty in us. He uses his powers in many ways for our benefit. Remember the passage that tells how all things work together for our good. Such workings are invisible to the world, but they are visible to us who love him if we will only look.

## Living from the power of God

- **For even if he was crucified from weakness, yet he lives from the power of God. For we in him are also weak, but we will live with him from the power of God toward you** (Second Corinthians 13:4).

Jesus was crucified from worldly weakness but with spiritual strength. For it was his spiritual strength that enabled him to endure his worldly weakness so that he could condemn sin and earn the right to redeem all who belong to him from the condemnation of their sins. And having endured that worldly weakness, he now lives in heaven from the power of God as King of kings and Lord of lords.

And while we live in the world we too, we who are in him, are also weak. For the genuine Church of Christ has always been weak. And his genuine disciples have always been weak relative to the world.

Remember what Paul said about us in his first letter to the Corinthians: **“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).

Nevertheless, just as we are weak in the world, we will also live with Christ from the power of God. For it is only by the power of God that our souls can be raised up into heaven to be with Christ and to reign with him.

## Test yourselves

- **Examine yourselves whether ye are in the faith. Test yourselves** (Second Corinthians 13:5).

That is just one more of the many scriptures proving the falsity of the very popular doctrines of salvation-by-faith-only and once-saved-always-saved. For if we are forever saved merely by believing, then why would Paul command us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith? It would have no meaning. But in fact we are not saved forever merely by believing. Be not led astray with the multitude by that seductive teaching.

Therefore, we must examine ourselves and test ourselves about our faithfulness to the good news of Christ. And the standard we must use to examine ourselves is the word of God, the Holy Bible. It is the only true standard by which we can determine if we are in the faith. That is why false teachers belittle the importance of the Bible, and try to confuse people about what it says. With its easy availability now there is no excuse for not using it. Trust the word of God and not the words of men.

## Jesus Christ is in us

- **Or know ye not yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless ye are somehow unfit** (Second Corinthians 13:5).

Paul said the Spirit of Jesus Christ is in us. Like God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ is in us by the dynamic knowledge we have of him and his will for us that is at work in our intellect, plus by the feelings we have in our hearts for his truth and righteousness that motivate our lives. I explain more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Notice, however, how Paul qualified what he said about Jesus Christ being in us. He said Christ was in us, *unless* we were somehow unfit. That means if we are unfit then Christ is not in us. Unfit men are always going to be found somewhere in the church. Remember, one of the apostles of Christ was unfit. That is why we (collectively) must examine ourselves to see who is genuinely in the faith and who is unfit. Remember what Jesus said about false prophets: **“From their fruits ye will know them”** (Matthew 7:16). And in the same way it is by their fruits that we can know who among us is unfit.

## Not unfit

- **But I hope that ye will know that we are not unfit** (Second Corinthians 13:6).

Paul and his co-workmen were certainly not unfit. Remember how he said, **“Indeed the signs of the apostle were performed among you in all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty works”** (Second Corinthians 12:12). By the fruits of Paul and his co-workmen they could know they were not unfit. And Paul was no doubt hoping the disciples at Corinth would judge him and his co-workmen that way.

### Do them nothing harmful

- **Now I pray to God, to do you nothing harmful, not that we would appear approved, but that ye would do right, even if we were unfit** (Second Corinthians 13:7).

Paul had great love for Christ and his disciples. Therefore, he prayed God to help him do nothing harmful to them. And I too pray to God to help me do nothing harmful to my fellow Christians. I continually pray to him that how I have translated the Bible, and how I have interpreted what it says, are always faithful to the truth, so that I would do you nothing harmful. For there are translations and interpretations that have done much harm to those who believe in Christ, leading them astray about many things.

Paul’s motive for not wanting to do them anything harmful was not simply that he and his co-workmen would appear approved. His motive was for their benefit not his. He wanted them to do right, regardless of whether Paul and his co-workmen were approved or unfit. Paul was a humble and unselfish man who was completely devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ and all who belong to him. Therefore, he wanted them to do right regardless of anything about him and his co-workmen.

### His power was only for the truth

- **For we do not have any power against the truth, but for the truth** (Second Corinthians 13:8).

Paul was speaking about the special powers given by the Holy Spirit. Remember, he had performed many signs and wonders and mighty works among them. And he wanted the disciples to know that those powers were only for the truth. Indeed, he said he did not have any power at all against the truth. Those powers that came from the special gifts of the Holy Spirit could only be used for that one purpose, which was to promote the truth of the good news of Christ. Therefore, it would have been impossible to misuse them.

The myth that Satan has any supernatural powers to do anything good is a great lie. God has sometimes allowed Satan to do some things supernaturally, but only things that are evil and harmful. And even then he is very limited.

What God allowed Satan to do to Job is an example (see Job 1). And Peter said about our oppressions, **“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 10:38).

And Paul said, **“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 1:19-20).

## Glad in weakness and in strength

- **For we are glad when we are weak and ye are strong** (Second Corinthians 13:9).

Remember what the Lord said to Paul when he prayed that his thorn in the flesh might depart from him: **“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made fully perfect in weakness.”** And remember what Paul then said about it: **“More gladly therefore I will boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of the Christ may reside in me”** (Second Corinthians 12:9).

Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen were glad when they were weak. They were not weak in spirit; they were weak in the worldly sense. And their weakness helped make the disciples strong, strong both in spirit and in the worldly sense. As Paul said to Timothy, **“For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life, and of that which is coming”** (First Timothy 4:8).

Piety makes a man strong both in spirit and in things of the world. Piety is choosing the righteousness of God and rejecting sin and wickedness, and that makes a man wise. And Solomon said, **“The crown of the wise is their riches. The foolishness of fools is folly”** (Proverbs 14:24).

## Praying for their perfection

- **And this also we pray for, your perfection** (Second Corinthians 13:9).

God wants us to continually grow in spirit, which is our inner man. Remember what Paul said about that: **“Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day”** (Second Corinthians 4:16). And that renewal is intended for our perfection.

We should never be content with our spiritual development. None of us will ever reach full perfection. Nevertheless, perfection should be our goal. Thus, we should strive daily for perfection. For example, we need to continually purge ourselves of every evil action, word, and thought, as long as we are in this body of flesh. Remember, 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”** (Galatians 5:17).

We also need to continually study the word of God, increasing our knowledge of his will for us. We need to continually learn how to enlarge our eyes and our hearts to promote God’s truth and righteousness. Learn to look for ways, even the little ways, to be constructive and productive, helpful and beneficial. We should both work and pray for our perfection. As Peter said, **“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (Second Peter 3:18). And as each disciple grows to perfection, so then the church will grow to perfection.

Nevertheless remember, always use wisdom in whatever you do. Good intentions without careful forethought and caution will often do as much harm as good.

## Why he wrote those things while absent

- **Because of this I write these things while absent, so that I may not act harshly when present, according to the authority that the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down** (Second Corinthians 13:10).

Remember what Paul said about coming to them: **“For I fear lest somehow, having come, I may find you not such as I want, and I may be found by you such as ye do not want. Lest somehow there be strifes, envyings, wraths, selfish ambitions, slanderings, whisperings, puffings up, turmoils. lest having come again my God will make me low toward you, and I will bewail many of those who have sinned previously, and who did not repent from the trash and fornication and licentiousness that they committed”** (Second Corinthians 12:20-21).

That was why Paul wrote those things while he was absent from them. He wanted to find them such as he wanted. And by writing to them while absent it would give them time to change whatever needed changing so that they would be such as he wanted. That would prevent Paul from acting harshly when he was present with them, which he wanted to avoid.

The Lord had given Paul the authority to act harshly toward them. However, Paul also said the Lord gave him that authority for the purpose of building up and not tearing down. Nevertheless, that does not mean Paul’s authority could not be used to act harshly toward them. It means the goal of that authority is for building up, not for tearing down.

And if it were necessary for Paul to act harshly toward them, that would involve the risk of tearing down. It would involve the risk of causing some of them to fall away from the church. However, that would not be the fault of Paul. For remember how many of Jesus’ followers departed from him after he gave a hard lesson to them: **“From this, many of his disciples went back at these things, and walked no more with him”** (John 6:66).

## Do right and God will be with you

- **Finally brothers, farewell. Be thoroughly prepared, be encouraged, think the same way, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you** (Second Corinthians 13:11).

In his departing words Paul gave more good advice to them with some simple words. He said they should

be thoroughly prepared  
be encouraged  
think the same way  
live in peace

Being thoroughly prepared is good advice for doing anything. And it is especially important, vitally important, to be thoroughly prepared spiritually. Jesus gave many lessons and

parables to teach the importance of being prepared. Remember the one about the five foolish virgins: **“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 25:10-13).

Jesus often commanded his disciples to be alert and watch. For example, in this passage Jesus said, **“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).

What Jesus meant by being alert and watching was to be prepared. And as Paul commanded, we should be thoroughly prepared. And that means purging ourselves of every uncleanness, and living a righteous life, being always true and faithful to the Lord.

Paul also told them to be encouraged. To encourage means to strengthen courage. Discouragement is weakened courage to act. Jesus was never discouraged about anything. He was certainly disappointed about many things, but he was never discouraged. Therefore, strive to keep yourself from ever getting discouraged.

Always pray, trust God, and hearken to these words: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21). And remember, regardless of what happens, **“... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

Paul also commanded us to think the same way. That means we should all have the same world view. We should all want to understand the word of God correctly. We should all have the same goal of living righteously and fruitfully for the Lord according to our circumstances and opportunities. We should all set our eyes on the things above, longing for our home in heaven. We should all think the same way that Jesus thought. For Paul said, **“But we have the mind of Christ”** (First Corinthians 2:16).

Paul also commanded us to live in peace. Remember however, that should be a goal, not a strict requirement. For remember, Paul also said, **“If possible from you, keeping peace with all men ...”** (Romans 12:18). And Jesus said, **“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).

Our goal should always be to live in peace, true peace. Peace with sin and wickedness is a false and superficial peace, typically enforced by ruthless autocrats. Genuine peace can only come when righteousness is victorious over sin and wickedness. When the members of a congregation defeat all the sin and wickedness among them, then they can live in peace among each other. And that should be our goal.

When we live according to such virtues as those that Paul listed, then the God of love and peace will be with us. That is a guarantee because our God is a God of love and peace. Remember, John said that God was himself love: **“He who does not love does not know God, because God is love”** (First John 4:8). And because God is also a God of peace that is why he combats sin and wickedness. For only when sin and wickedness are defeated can there be genuine peace.

## Saluting each other

- **Salute each other by a holy kiss. All the sanctified salute you** (Second Corinthians 13:12-13).

That is virtually the same thing Paul said near the end of his letter to the Romans: **“Salute each other by a holy kiss. The congregations of Christ salute you”** (Romans 16:16). He also said the same thing near the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, **“All the brothers salute you. Salute each other by a holy kiss”** (First Corinthians 16:20). Paul also commanded the disciples at Thessalonica to salute each other by a holy kiss: **“Brothers, pray about us. Salute all the brothers by a holy kiss”** (First Thessalonians 5:25-26).

The only difference is how he described those who saluted them. In Romans he referred to them as the congregations of Christ; in his first letters to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians he referred to them as all the brothers; in this second letter to the Corinthians he referred to them as all the sanctified.

That means all the congregations of Christ are the sanctified of God and are brothers of each other. And we should all salute each other and greet each other in an affectionate way. Indifferent and cool greetings are a violation of our command to salute each other with genuine affection.

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.

## God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit were with them

- **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, are with all of you. Truly** (Second Corinthians 13:14).

Paul said near the end of his letter to the Romans, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with all of you. Truly”** (Romans 16:24). And he said virtually the same thing near the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with you”** (First Corinthians 16:23).

However, Paul says here at the end of his second letter to the Corinthians that (1) the grace of Christ, (2) the love of God, and (3) the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, were with all of them.

The grace of Christ is the eternal salvation he offers us for believing and obeying him. And that grace remains with us as long as we remain faithful to him.

The love of God for us is manifested in far too many blessing to ever list. Indeed, I have no doubt that most of his blessings are unseen and unknown to us. Nevertheless, Paul said that the love of God was with all of them; that is, all of the faithful disciples of Christ.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is his presence within us, his presence that works within in our minds and our hearts. The Holy Spirit works in fellowship within us to help us better understand the will of God for us, and to better apply that will in order to promote the good news of Christ. And the Holy Spirit of God will always be within us, as long as we remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ.



## A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to the Galatians

### Paul and all the brothers with him

- **Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead), and all the brothers with me, to the congregations of Galatia: (Galatians 1:1-2).**

Paul was made an apostle after Christ ascended into heaven. And it was Christ himself who appeared to Paul from heaven in a vision and called him to be an apostle. An apostle is a man who is sent on a mission. And Jesus appeared to Paul in that vision to appoint him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, to bring the good news of salvation to them.

For Jesus said to him during that vision: **“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 26:16-18). Therefore, Paul was not made an apostle from men nor through man, but directly through Christ, and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

This book is a letter Paul wrote to the congregations of Galatia. Unlike his other letters in the New Testament, this one was not addressed to just one congregation or to one man. Galatia was a Roman province in central Asia Minor. In this salutation Paul said it was from him and all the brothers with him. That does not mean all the brothers with him were co-authors of the book. It simply means they joined Paul in sending their greetings. How many congregations there were in Galatia when Paul wrote this book is not told.

### Grace and peace to them from God and Christ

- **Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, so that he might rescue us, according to the will of our God and Father, out of the evil age that has come, to whom is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly (Galatians 1:3-5).**

Paul and all the brothers with him called for blessings from God and Christ to them. They called for grace and peace, which means they prayed that God would do them good and bring peace to them. They also mentioned how Christ is our Lord, and that he gave himself up for our sins so that he might rescue our souls out of this evil world. Jesus gave himself up according to the will of our God and Father by living an obedient life of self-sacrifice and submitting to a cruel death upon the cross.

God knew that it was necessary for Christ to live a sacrificial and sinless life in the world. It was necessary in order to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, and to prove there is no excuse for sin because it is not inevitable. Thus, God could justly condemn all who sin

against him, and Christ could justly redeem from that condemnation all who belong to him. He could redeem us because he earned that right by giving himself up for our sins in obedience to the will of our God and Father.

This world is an evil age because it is filled with sin and wickedness. I speak much more about the nature of our world in my books *King Solomon's Advice for the World* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### Some were confusing 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** (Galatians 1:6-7).

Paul often fought battles against men who were attempting to pervert the good news of the Christ. Such men were not limited to the times of Paul. They have continued throughout the history of the church. And it is heartbreaking to see how they have misled most of the people who believe in Christ. They have misled them with their perverted teachings and doctrines, which create a counterfeit good news.

The most successful of those perversions has been the Catholic Church, which kept the believers in Christ from knowing the truth of the scriptures for centuries. The primary motive of those who lead the Catholic Church is to have complete control of all believers, which actually happened for about a thousand years. And such control could only be done by restricting access to the New Testament scriptures that teach the truth of the good news of Christ.

However, the Catholic Church is not the only group that has attempted to pervert the good news of Christ. For there are many of the Protestant churches that have done the same thing, albeit in different ways. The most popular of those ways are the perverse doctrines of once-saved-always-saved, and salvation-by-faith-only. The primary motive of men who lead those Protestant churches is the desire for popularity. They are called Protestant churches because they are the result of those who protested the doctrines of the dominant Catholic Church.

But regardless of their motives, those who misinterpret the scriptures and try to pervert the good news of Christ are confusing people. There are now so many different denominations that few people know what the authentic good news of Christ is about. Indeed, most people now think it does not matter as long as you believe in Christ. And that itself is a perverse idea.

Notice how Paul said another good news was not another, because there is no other good news of Christ. There is only one genuine good news of Christ, with only one genuine church of Christ (although it is also called by other names). There are no denominations in the kingdom of God. And there is only one Holy Bible to guide our way. For all of its teachings are about the same doctrines that never conflict.

## A curse against those preaching contrary

- **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).

Those are very strong words of condemnation. Paul uttered a curse against all who preach a good news contrary to what he and his co-workmen preached. And he included himself and his co-workmen, and even any agent from heaven, in that curse—if they had preached something different. And Paul even uttered that curse twice to reinforce the condemnation of such false teachers.

Paul's curse may seem very different from what Jesus commanded. Remember, Jesus said, **“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). Moreover, Paul taught the same thing that Jesus commanded, when he said to the Romans, **“Bless those who persecute you. Bless ye and do not curse”** (Romans 12:14).

The fact is, however, Jesus did not command us to never curse anyone. He commanded against cursing those who curse us, who hate us, who mistreat us, and who persecuted us. Those are men who are hostile to us and to the good news of Christ. However, Jesus never commanded us against cursing those who preach a contrary good news. They are the most dangerous men of all, and they deserve to be cursed.

Regarding the word curse, most men now use that word to mean uttering vulgar speech. That is not how Paul used the word, nor is it how the word is ever used in the Bible. That modern use is another insidious way to confuse people about the truth of the word of God. Be not misled by such false meanings.

## Trusting men or God

- **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).

There are many examples showing that people trust men instead of God. One such example is the theory of evolution. The testimony of God that is given in the book of Genesis says that **“in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them ...”** (Exodus 20:11). Yet men proclaim that the world was not created, it simply evolved. And they say that evolutionary process has taken many billions of years.

Some foolish believers attempt to please men by agreeing that the world has taken many billions of years to evolve. For example, they twist the words of the Bible record to say that six days really means billions of years.

Other foolish believers ignore various commands of Christ because men tell them that obedience is not necessary. They trust men instead of the word of God. And those who

teach them such things do so because it pleases men. One of the most prominent examples is the command to be immersed in water for the remission of sins. Popular preachers say it is not necessary. They say it is not necessary, because if they said it was necessary they would no longer be popular. They seek to please men instead of God.

Paul made it very clear that pleasing men is incompatible with being a bondman of Christ. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you”** (John 15:18). As long as the world is disobedient to God, it is impossible to please men and still be faithful to Christ.

### What Paul preached was not from man

- **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 disciples in Galatia were being seduced to accept another good news, a different good news, a false good news, one that Paul had not preached to them. Paul wanted them to know that there is only one authentic good news of Christ. And that is what he preached to them. It was the authentic good news of Christ because it was received by him through revelation of Jesus Christ himself.

The apostles of Jesus spent three years living and working with him, and learning about his good news of our salvation. Yet even that was not enough for them to know all about it. 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).

How the Holy Spirit taught them is not told. Nor does Paul explain how he received the good news by revelation of Jesus Christ. God commonly spoke to men in visions and dreams and through his heavenly agents, although he sometimes used other ways. For example, he first spoke to Moses through a burning bush. However, God later spoke to him directly mouth to mouth. For when Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses’ authority, the record says, **“And Jehovah came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both came forth.**

**“And he said, Hear now my words. If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches, and he has beheld the form of Jehovah. Why then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, against Moses?”** (Numbers 12:5-8).

God no longer speaks to some men personally the way he did before the Bible was written. God now speaks to us through the written record that was left to us by his prophets. In those last days God spoke through his son Jesus Christ. As the author 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).

Jesus spoke directly to men when he was on the earth. But after his ascension into heaven he spoke through his apostles. After the death of Jesus' apostles, God's word was assembled together in what we now call the Bible. And that is the means by which he now speaks to us. And after that time any man who claims God has spoken to him personally is a liar. Believe him not.

## His former opposition

- **For ye heard of my former behavior in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God to extraordinariness, and ravaged it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my race, being a more extreme zealot of my paternal traditions (Galatians 1:13-14).**

This is the only place in the Bible where the word Judaism is used. It is not a name for the religion that God gave to his people Israel. It is the name for a hybrid religion created by the Jews. It consists of some of the laws of Moses combined with a host of their own traditions, which they call "the oral law." That "oral law" is of their own creation, not given them by God.

Jesus condemned that hybrid religion. For an example, remember this story: **"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).

Paul was caught up in that hybrid religion called Judaism during his youth. He was so zealous for it that he advanced in it beyond many of his contemporaries. And it was that extreme zeal that drove him to persecute the church of God to extraordinariness and ravage it.

Paul was never an evil wicked man. Paul said about himself that he was **"the man who was formerly blasphemous, and a persecutor, and an aggressor. But I obtained mercy because I did it being ignorant in unbelief"** (First Timothy 1:13). After Paul became an apostle of Christ, and he was later being tried before the rulers of the Jews, he said to them, **"Men, brothers, I have been a citizen in all good conscience to God until this day"** (Acts 23:1).

Incidentally, the word Christianity is not a Bible word. The religion God gave through his Son Jesus Christ is called the good news, which is traditionally called the Gospel, from the

Old English, god spell. I prefer the more meaningful name good news, because that describes what it is—the good news of the salvation of our souls and our adoption as children of God.

## God separated Paul

- **But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s belly and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, so that I might preach him among the Gentiles ...** (Galatians 1:15-16).

Paul said that God separated him from his mother’s belly. That means even before he was born God had a plan to set him apart and use him as the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles. Centuries before Paul, God also said he had a plan for Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet: **“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou came forth out of the womb I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations”** (Jeremiah 1:5).

Nevertheless, men like Jeremiah and Paul, whom God chose before they were born, could have rejected God’s calling, because we all have free will. For example, God chose Saul, the son of Kish, to be the first king of Israel. Yet Saul kept disobeying God. Therefore, God rejected Saul and chose David to replace him. And if Jeremiah and Paul had been disobedient to God, he would have chosen other men to replace them. But I thank God both Jeremiah and Paul remained faithful to him, and proved themselves worthy of his calling.

Actually, God has a plan for every man, although not as profound as those of Jeremiah and Paul. Indeed, God has a plan for everything. For Solomon said, **“Jehovah has made everything for its own end, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil”** (Proverbs 16:4). And God said to Isaiah, **“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure ...”** (Isaiah 46:9-10).

God has plans for every man, but they are often not fulfilled because men rebel against him. Nevertheless, even when they do rebel God has alternate plans to accommodate for man’s disobedience. God created those plans even before the world began. Hence, he knows everything that can happen and its outcome, although he does not determine everything we do because he has given us free will. I say much more about those things in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

## After Paul’s conversion

- **... I did not straightaway confer with flesh and blood. Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit with Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days. But I did not see another of the apostles, only James the Lord’s brother** (Galatians 1:16-19).

Paul said that after his calling by the Lord he did not straightaway confer with flesh and blood, nor did he go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before him. Paul said he went into

Arabia. What was called Arabia in those days covered a much larger territory than the modern country of Arabia. Therefore, the land of Arabia where Paul went was quite close to Damascus where Paul was converted.

Many conjectures have been made about what Paul did in Arabia and how long he remained there. I personally believe it was there that Paul received the good news **“through revelation of Jesus Christ.”** I believe it was after spending a relatively short time becoming acquainted with the disciples in Damascus and learning about the church from them, that Paul went into the wilderness in Arabia to receive his revelation of the good news from Christ himself. I believe it was there that the Lord taught him what he needed to know in order to proclaim his good news to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. For that was why Paul was chosen.

Remember, Paul had not been with Jesus as the other apostles had. Indeed, he probably never even saw Jesus while he was on the earth. The other apostles had been with Jesus for three years learning about the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God. Therefore, Paul had much to learn.

How long Paul remained in Arabia is not told. Moses was with Jehovah on mount Sinai forty days when he was given the law for the sons of Israel. It may have taken Paul that long to learn all he needed from the Lord to prepare him to proclaim the good news.

After being in Arabia Paul returned to Damascus. That must have been when he boldly **“proclaimed the Christ in the synagogues, that this man is the Son of God.”** And Paul continued until the plot by the Jews to destroy him. It was then that he fled Damascus and went to Jerusalem. The three years that Paul mentioned was probably the total amount of time he spent in Arabia receiving his revelations about the good news of Christ, plus his time in Damascus boldly preaching that good news.

The book of Acts says that Paul did meet the other apostles at Jerusalem eventually: **“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).

The fifteen days that Paul spent with Peter may have been to assure the disciples in Jerusalem that Paul was a genuine disciple. It was apparently after that when Barnabas brought Paul to the other apostles.

Paul may have seen James to learn more about the life of Jesus. There is a man named James who was very active in the church at Jerusalem. Who that man was is controversial. However, I personally do not believe he was James the Lord’s brother. I say more about James in the first part of the book by his name.

## Paul did not lie in what he wrote

- **Now what I write to you, behold before God, I do not lie** (Galatians 1:20).

Paul assured the Galatians that he was not lying to them. He truly did receive the authentic good news of Christ, not from men but by revelation from Christ himself. And that is what

he was writing to them. Moreover, he reinforced his claim by making it before God. That was the strongest language he could use, without swearing to it, which Jesus forbade of us. Remember, he forbade it because as his disciples our word should always be true, without need for swearing to it. Therefore, Paul told them, that in the sight of God he was not lying.

## Paul in Syria and Cilicia

- **Later I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia** (Galatians 1:21).

The brothers at Jerusalem had sent Paul away to Tarsus in Cilicia after his life was threatened there: **“And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem, and speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. 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 9:28-30).

Later Barnabas went to Tarsus to bring Paul to Antioch in Syria where many Gentiles had been converted: **“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).

## The congregations heard of his preaching

- **And I was unknown by face to the congregations of Judea in Christ, but they were only hearing that the man who once persecuted us now preaches the good news, the faith that he once ravaged. And they glorified God in me** (Galatians 1:22-24).

Jesus called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, his primary work of preaching the good news of Christ was in the Gentile nations, although he did preach for a short time in Jerusalem. Consequently, Paul was not seen by most members of the congregations of Christ in Judea. Nevertheless, they heard the news that he was converted to Christ and began preaching the good news. And since he had been such a dangerous threat to them, that news was certainly cause for glorifying God about him. It was a double blessing to them: it removed that dangerous threat, and it brought a new and powerful ally for them.

## Reporting his preaching among the Gentiles

- **Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, having taken along Titus also. And I went up according to revelation, and I declared to them the good news that I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of repute, lest somehow I might be running or had run in vain** (Galatians 2:1-2).

Remember, for some reason Titus is never mentioned in the book of Acts. Nevertheless, Paul here mentions taking him with Barnabas when he went again to Jerusalem. The meaning of the fourteen years is debated. It could mean fourteen years after his conversion

on the road to Damascus. It could mean fourteen years after he departed Jerusalem going to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Nevertheless, whatever it means is unimportant.

The important thing is why he went up again to Jerusalem. Paul said he went up according to revelation. In other words, the Lord told Paul to go there again. And his purpose was to declare **“to those who were of repute”** the good news that he preached among the Gentiles. And that was to verify he had not been **“running or had run in vain.”** It was both to confirm to Paul and to the disciples at Jerusalem that his preaching of the good news to the Gentiles was correct. That could also confirm to the Gentiles that Paul’s preaching was the genuine good news of Christ. And that is what he was trying to do in this letter to the Galatians, especially because they were changing to a false good news.

Those who were of repute were men like Peter, James, and John. Paul says a little farther they **“were reputed to be pillars.”** There were times when Jesus selected those three men to accompany him somewhere. For example, they are the men he took with him on the mountain where he was transfigured and spoke with Moses and Elijah (see Matthew 17:1-3).

The reason Paul spoke first to them about his preaching was no doubt to avoid any kind of open disputing among the disciples at Jerusalem, which might not have been necessary. And indeed it was not necessary.

However, it became necessary later because the book of Acts says that when Paul was in Antioch, **“... 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).

## Circumcision is not compulsory

- **But not even Titus with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But that issue was because of those false brothers smuggled in, who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us. To whom we yielded in subjection not even for an hour, so that the truth of the good news might continue with you** (Galatians 2:3-5).

In Paul’s private meeting with “those who were of repute” Titus the Gentile disciple was not compelled to be circumcised. Circumcision was demanded by men whom Paul called false brothers. They were Jews who only pretended to be Christians so that they could act as spies. Spies not only gather information about enemies, but they also work to sabotage their activities. Those false brothers tried to destroy the liberty the early Gentile Christians had from the yoke of the law, and impose all those statutes and ordinances upon them.

All the Jews in Israel were still compelled to be under that yoke because the people and their rulers rejected their Messiah and clung to their false religion of Judaism with all of its laws and binding traditions. However, God finally destroyed that yoke when he sent the Roman army against them forty years after Jesus began his ministry.

The Gentiles had never been under that yoke, but when Gentiles were converted to Christ, false disciples of the Jews tried to impose it upon them. And the first act of that bondage was circumcision. However, Paul and the other apostles opposed them so that the truth of the good news might continue with us, the truth that we are under the law of liberty and not the law of Moses. It was at the conference they held later in Jerusalem with the elders and apostles that officially ended the demands for the Gentile disciples to be circumcised and obey the laws of Moses.

Therefore, beware of men who teach obedience to laws of Moses. For example, there are still many who claim we should keep the sabbath day, and they say we should still tithe. The so called Messianic Christians even claim we should keep the feast days required of the Jews, and other such things.

### The personage of man

- **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 (Galatians 2:6).**

As in every generation there are men who have a better reputation than others. And there were such men among the disciples of Christ at Jerusalem. Paul called them men of repute. Notice however, Paul never called them rulers.

They were men of repute because of the reputation of their service. However, remember what Jesus said to them about rulers: **“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).

Paul had greatly served the cause of Christ, but he was not considered a man of repute. He certainly deserved a high reputation, but apparently among the Jewish Christians he was not considered a man of repute. That may be why Paul made light of such reputations. He knew how common it was for reputations among men to be unjust. Men always want to look up to personages, but God does not accept such things. He does not honor the reputation of a man among men. He judges the spirit of a man, not how he is seen by other men.

Paul had received the complete good news of Christ by revelation. Those men of repute among the disciples at Jerusalem added nothing to Paul that he had not already received and was teaching.

### They added nothing but their fellowship

- **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 when they understood the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, those who were reputed to be**

**pillars, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship**  
(Galatians 2:6-9).

Those men of repute saw that Paul was entrusted with the good news for the Gentiles (men of uncircumcision) because (1) of what he was teaching, and (2) because of the mighty signs and wonders that he had performed. Therefore, they added nothing to him.

Paul here mentions James and Cephas (Peter) and John as reputed to be pillars. They were certainly great men of faith who were loyal apostles of Christ. And they bore much fruit in his service. They were considered pillars because of their powerful work in supporting the good news of Christ. They deserved to have a good reputation.

However, Paul also deserved to have a good reputation, but apparently he was not considered a man of repute, at least not among the disciples at Jerusalem. He was no doubt recognized as a man of repute among the Gentile Christians, although he had enemies within some of those congregations who tried to undermine his reputation. Remember what he quoted one of them having 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).

Those faithful apostles, James and Cephas and John, recognized the good work that Paul was doing, and so they gave him and his co-workman Barnabas the right hands of fellowship. Paul said that Titus was also there, but for some reason he was not named with Paul and Barnabas. Perhaps it was because Barnabas and Paul were the men who first evangelized in the Gentile nations; they were the pioneering leaders in that work. Moreover, Paul and Barnabas were Jews, while Titus was a Gentile

## Some for the Gentiles and some for the Jews

- **So that we were for the Gentiles, and they for men of circumcision, only that we should remember the poor, which this same thing I also was eager to do** (Galatians 2:9-10).

Peter, James, John, and the other apostles all worked to convert the Jews, and also the half-breed Hebrews called the Samaritans. Paul was the apostle for the Gentiles and Peter was the apostles for the men of circumcision (the Jews). They were leaders in that work, but many other men worked with them. Therefore, he spoke in the plural about who were for the Gentiles and who were for the Jews.

Israel was a small country with many poor people in it. The Gentile nations were more prosperous, which meant they could afford to send aid to poor people of Israel. The Bible speaks twice as much about the poor as about the rich. And when Jesus was upon the earth he was especially concerned about the poor.

Remember what he said to the messengers of John when he sent them to inquire of Jesus: **“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. And blessed is he, whoever will not be caused to stumble by me”** (Matthew 11:4-6).

And remember what he said about inviting people when we make a dinner: **“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).

Paul was eager to remember the poor because every righteous soul wants to help the poor, the genuine deserving poor, not the foolish and lazy souls that make themselves poor. In this dark and sinful world we must use wisdom and caution even when we do simple things like helping the poor.

### A time of hypocrisy

- **But when Peter came to Antioch I opposed him to the face, because he was blameworthy. For before certain men came from James he ate together with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing men of circumcision. And the other Jews also joined in hypocrisy with him, so that even Barnabas went along with their hypocrisy** (Galatians 2:11-13).

There have been many men who have sought to deny that the Peter mentioned in that passage was the apostle. However, the context makes it very clear he was. Moreover, Paul would certainly have made it known if he was not Peter the apostle. The embarrassing truth is that the guilty man whom Paul spoke about was Peter the apostle.

The men who came from James were disciples of Christ, but they were also Jews who were living in Jerusalem. The reason why Peter and the other Jews withdrew and separated themselves is because of the traditional contempt held by the Jews toward the Gentiles. It was considered a disgrace to eat with them. Their attitude was similar to the attitude of most southerners in America about the Negroes before the civil rights movement.

That attitude of contempt by the Jews toward the Gentiles was even made a part of their law, which forbade any Jew from fraternizing or associating in any way with a Gentile. For remember what Peter said to Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him: **“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).

They even thought they would be defiled by them. Remember how the rulers of the Jews acted toward Pilate the Roman governor: **“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”** (John 18:28).

God never commanded such an attitude toward Gentiles. On the contrary the law of Moses commanded them to love the Gentiles who were among them: **“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).

The only exception to that attitude of the Jews was toward Gentiles who would be circumcised and become Jewish proselytes. They would associate with them. For there were many Gentiles that were members of the synagogues in the Gentile nations. Remember, they were the men who were most receptive to Paul's preaching of the good news of Christ.

Peter and the other men with him obviously wanted to avoid being embarrassed before all of those Jews from Jerusalem, and also avoid being accused of violating their law against eating with (non-proselyte) Gentiles. Consequently, they withdrew and separated themselves.

Peter and the Jews with him had been willing to eat with the uncircumcised Gentiles, but not publicly in the sense of it being well known by other Jews. They may also have justified themselves by thinking that such knowledge would undermine their credibility among the Jews, and thus hurt their evangelistic efforts with them.

When it was that Peter came to Antioch is not known because the Bible record does not say. That is just another of many trivial details that are not recorded in the Bible.

## Paul rebukes Peter

- **But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly toward the truth of the good news, I said to Peter before all, If thou being a Jew, live as a Gentile and not as a Jew, why do thou compel the Gentiles to live as Jews?**  
(Galatians 2:14).

Paul was un-fazed by any kind of risk to his reputation among the Jews. Since Paul was the apostle for the Gentiles and had converted many of them, he knew the truth of the good news about Jews and Gentiles. Jesus had broken down the dividing wall of partitions between them.

As Paul said to the brothers at Ephesus, **“Remember therefore that once ye, the Gentiles in flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision (in flesh, made by hands), that ye were at that time independent of Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and unknown of the covenants of the promise, having no hope and godless in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye, being formerly far off, became near in the blood of the Christ.**

**“For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the dividing wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity—the law of the commandments in ordinances—so that he might create in himself the two into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it”** (Ephesians 2:11-16).

By eating and associating with the Gentiles, Peter was living as a Gentile and not the way the Jews were living toward them. However, by withdrawing and separating himself from the Gentiles when the Jews from James came, Peter was indicating to the Gentiles that they must be circumcised and become proselytes before he would fraternize in public with them; meaning they must live as Jews. And that was not walking uprightly toward the truth of the good news of Christ. Therefore, Paul would have none of it.

Although Paul rebuked Peter because of that incident, Peter still had great regard for him. For Peter said in his second letter, “**And consider the longsuffering of our Lord, salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him ...**” (Second Peter 3:15). Peter called Paul a beloved brother. They were both men with the Spirit of Christ in them.

### Faith in Christ, not works of law

- **We are Jews by nature and not sinful men of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not made righteous from works of law, instead through faith of Jesus Christ. And we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made righteous from faith of Christ, and not from works of law, because no flesh will be made righteous from works of law** (Galatians 2:15-16).

Jews by nature were men who were the descendants of Abraham. They were not sinful men of the Gentiles, because they had been reared in the knowledge of God’s righteousness, which was manifested in the law of Moses. Nevertheless, the good news of Christ taught them that no man is made righteous from works of law. No man is made righteous that way because no man in the flesh can obey all of the laws perfectly. And a single sin will condemn us. Only Jesus Christ was able to keep every law perfectly, but he was more than a man; he is the only begotten the Son of God.

We are made righteous through faith of Jesus Christ, because only he is able to redeem our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins. And it is through that redemption that we are made righteous in the sight of God.

### We cannot be in Christ and still be sinful

- **But if, while seeking to be made righteous in Christ, we ourselves were also found sinful, then is Christ an aide of sin? May it not happen!** (Galatians 2:17).

We cannot live sinful lives and still be made righteous in Christ. We cannot live sinful lives and expect Christ to redeem our souls. We cannot live sinful lives and think the blood of Christ will pay all our debts to God. If we seek to be made righteous in Christ, but still live sinful lives, that would imply that Christ was an aide of sin. And that would indeed be an abomination, bringing reproach upon him.

As Paul said to the sinful Jews, “**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). Therefore, may it not happen that we are ever be found sinful.

### Building again what was torn down

- **For if I build again these things that I tore down, I demonstrate myself a transgressor** (Galatians 2:18).

What Paul tore down when he was converted to Christ was all of the things he was doing that transgressed against God. Therefore, if he built again those things, then he would be showing that he was a transgressor.

No man can return to living in transgression against God without becoming a transgressor. And that would separate him from Christ. When Paul was speaking about circumcision, he said to the Jews, **“For circumcision is indeed beneficial if thou perform law, but if thou are a transgressor of law, thy circumcision has become uncircumcision”** (Romans 2:25).

In the same way, if you are a transgressor of the righteousness of Christ, your redemption will become un-redemption. Your salvation will become un-salvation and you will die in your sins. The doctrine of once-saved-always-saved is false to what is taught in the word of God. Be not deceived by the many who believe it.

## Through law we died to law to live to God

- **For I, through law, died to law, so that I might live to God** (Galatians 2:19).

Paul died to law when he became a Christian by repenting and being immersed in water for the remission of his sins. We all die to law toward God when we give our lives to Christ. God no longer judges us according to our obedience to the laws of good and evil. He no longer judges us in a legalistic way.

Since God has adopted us to be his children we are free from a legalistic relationship with him. We are now under the law of liberty. He judges us according to the character of our spirit and our efforts to bear fruit for his righteousness. He chastens us when we occasionally transgress, but he does not condemn us.

And it was through law that we die to law. It was through law that Jesus earned the right to redeem our souls. He sacrificed his life in perfect obedience to the Father. Therefore, according to the laws of justice he deserved to be given the power to become our redeemer. Thus, through that law of justice for Christ, we who belong to Christ died to our bondage to a legal system with God. Therefore, as with Paul, through law we died to law so that we might live to God.

## Christ lives in us

- **I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And what I now live in flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me** (Galatians 2:20).

Later in this letter Paul explains what he means by bring crucified with Christ: **“And those of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and the lusts”** (Galatians 5:24). He also said to the congregation at Colossae: **“Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry”** (Colossians 3:5).

We have sacrificed our worldly lives, our lives of sin, and now live by the faith of the Son of God. For the Spirit of Christ lives in us. He lives in us

through our knowledge of him and his good news  
 through our faith in him  
 with our new conscience that energizes us to live for him and his righteousness

We have sacrificed our worldly lives for him because he loved us and gave himself up for us. He loves all of his sheep of the world, all whose spirits are worthy to become sons of God for eternity. Therefore, he sacrificed himself upon the cross so that he could redeem our souls and give us that wonderful opportunity.

## Righteousness is not through law

- **I do not disregard the grace of God, for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died in vain** (Galatians 2:21).

Our redemption through Christ was by the grace of God. It was because of God's great kindness that he commanded Jesus to suffer and die to become our redeemer. However, if instead we are made righteous before God through law, through our obedience to a legal system, then there would be no redemption of our sins. Thus, the great sacrifice of Jesus for us would have been in vain—if righteousness is through law.

But now our righteousness before God is not through law. It is not through law because no man (except for Christ himself) can live without violating law, and that condemns us. Therefore, our righteousness is through our obedient faith in his Son Jesus Christ. And in that way he can redeem us from the condemnation caused by our sins.

## Bewitched not to obey the truth

- **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 was so dismayed by their willingness to abandon the good news of Christ for some other doctrine that he wondered if they had been bewitched. How could they turn from the truth without being under some kind of evil spell? And Paul wanted to know who was the villain that had bewitched them that way.

For Christ had been described among them by Paul and his co-workmen. It was in their presence that Christ and his good news of salvation had been described to them. And Christ was described as having been crucified for them. Christ made the ultimate sacrifice to save their souls. How then could they disobey the truth about him?

## Are ye so foolish?

- **I only want to learn this from you. Did ye receive the Spirit from works of law, or from a listening ear of faith? Are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?** (Galatians 3:2-3).

A spirit is energy. The Spirit of God is living energy that can not only create lives, but can transform them, away from the destructiveness and degradation of sinfulness, to lives of

peace and productivity. That was the kind of Spirit the Galatians received, and it came through their listening ear of faith. It came to them because they were receptive to the good news of Christ, and they had put their faith in him. That is how their lives were transformed from the degeneracy of sinfulness to lives of truth and righteousness.

Having begun those new lives in the Spirit of God, Paul asked them if they were then made perfect by the flesh. The answer was obviously, no. They could not be made perfect by the flesh because the flesh is against the Spirit. As Paul said later in this letter, **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh”** (Galatians 5:17). Therefore, Paul rebuked them as being foolish to think they could be made perfect by the flesh. It is our bodies of flesh that lead us to the destructiveness and degradation of sin. For those who live the most by their lusts and impulses of the flesh are the most destructive and degenerate. It is the Spirit of God that gives life.

### Did ye suffer so many things in vain?

- **Did ye suffer so many things in vain? If it is indeed in vain** (Galatians 3:4).

Paul did not explain how those Christians in Galatia had suffered. But those words indicate they suffered many things for the cause of Christ. Paul and his co-workmen were not the only disciples of Christ who suffered for the good news. Every Christian must suffer with his struggles against the evil lusts of his flesh. And every Christian must endure the hatred and persecution that the world has for Christ and his good news, the genuine Christ and his genuine good news.

The book of Acts tells how we must all **“enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations.”** Because it says, **“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).

But those sufferings are not in vain. God has promised us a great reward for our faithfulness. Our sufferings would only be in vain if we turned away from the truth of Christ. And that was what threatened the souls of those Christians in Galatia.

### Are miracles from law or faith?

- **He therefore who supplies the Spirit to you and who works miracles among you, is it from works of law or from a listening ear of faith?** (Galatians 3:2-5).

Every soul receives the gift of the Holy Spirit of God when he becomes a disciple of Christ. Remember what Peter said to 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).

Moreover, special supernatural powers of the Holy Spirit were given to some of those first disciples of Christ. They were given in different degrees and in different ways. And some

of them were given the power to work miracles among them. Paul was especially endowed with such powers.

Those special gifts of the Holy Spirit were given before the New Testament was written. They were given to prove to the people that the good news of Christ was truly from God. However, they are no longer given because they are no longer needed. We have the New Testament record, and that is sufficient for any worthy soul to believe.

Paul asked those errant Christians in Galatia if those powers came to them from works of law or from a listening ear of faith. Many of them had been proselytes of the Jews, and had been obeying the laws of Moses. They had no special powers of the Holy Spirit then. It was only through their faith in Christ that God gave them those special gifts of the Holy Spirit. That should have been proof enough to them that the salvation of God was from faith in Christ, not works of law.

## Being blessed with the faithful Abraham

- **Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. Ye know therefore that those from faith, these are sons of Abraham. And the scripture having foreseen that God makes the Gentiles righteous from faith, proclaimed the good news in advance to Abraham: In thee all the nations will be blessed. So then those from faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham** (Galatians 3:6-9).

Abraham was the founding father of the Hebrew race, from which came the law of Moses centuries later. But it was the faith of Abraham that God reckoned to him for righteousness. Therefore, every man with the same kind of faith in God that Abraham had is a son of Abraham—a spiritual son.

God's promise to the faithful Abraham was that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed. That means God will reckon for righteousness the faith of souls in every nation on earth, not just the biological descendants of Abraham. And every soul from every nation who trusts and obeys God will become a part of his kingdom. And that was what God prophesied to Abraham, when he said, **“In thee all the nations will be blessed.”**

Remember what Jesus said about the positive effects of the kingdom of the heavens: **“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).

Therefore, not only would souls in those nations be blessed by their hope in the good news of Christ, but their nations would be blessed because of the leavening effect of the righteousness of those faithful souls. That leaven of righteousness increases righteousness wherever it is applied. And remember what Solomon said about righteousness and nations: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

## Living by works of law is a curse

- **For as many as are from works of law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is every man who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law, to do them. But that no man is made righteous by law before God, is evident, because, The righteous man will live from faith. And the law is not from faith, but the man who does them will live in them (Galatians 3:10-12).**

Paul then contrasted those who were from works of law instead of being made righteous from faith. Every man who is judged by God from works of law is under a curse, because no man can keep all laws perfectly. Only Jesus Christ the Son of God was able. And that proved his moral and spiritual superiority over all others.

Every man judged from works of law is under a curse because a single violation brings the condemnation of death. Remember the one sin of Adam. What did God say to him? **“Because thou have hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake. In toil thou shall eat of it all the days of thy life. Also, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee, and thou shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face thou shall eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it thou were taken. For thou are dust, and to dust thou shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).**

And do you think you will escape the condemnation of death because of your sins if you fail to accept the good news of Christ? Consider this warning from the book of Hebrews: **“Any man who has disregarded the law of Moses dies without mercies from two or three witnesses. By how much worse punishment do ye think he will deserve who has trampled the Son of God, and who considered profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who treated the Spirit of grace contemptuously? For we know him who said, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:28-31).**

## Christ redeemed us from that curse

- **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. So that the blessing of Abraham might occur for the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through the faith (Galatians 3:13-14).**

That law of Moses about a hanged man, 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).**

Regarding a tree, Jesus was not hung on a literal tree, because his cross was carried first by Jesus then by a man named Simon, a Cyrenian. Any wooden structure with a trunk and branches was called a tree. Hence, the cross of Christ which was made of a post with a crossbeam was considered a tree. Indeed, when Peter and John were being tried before the chief priests, Peter said to them, **“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye murdered, having hung on a tree”** (Acts 5:30).

Because of that law of Moses, the Jews wanted the Romans to hasten the death of Jesus on the cross. For the record says, **“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”** (John 19:31). If Jesus died on the sabbath, the Jews would have had to violate the sabbath to take him down.

Being hanged on a tree caused Jesus to become a curse. Jesus did nothing worthy of death. Even the sinful Roman governors Pilate and Herod admitted that, because the record says, **“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”** (Luke 23:13-15). Yet because of that law of Moses, even though Jesus was an innocent man, he became a curse when he was hanged on the cross. That means his body became a curse, not his eternal Spirit.

Jesus became a curse for our sakes. He allowed himself to become a curse in obedience to the will of the Father. God wanted Jesus to prove he was morally and spiritually superior by living a perfect life of self-sacrifice, even submitting to death by crucifixion in obedience to the Father. And by so doing he earned the right to redeem our souls, those of all who belong to him. And that includes both Jews and Gentiles alike. And it is through our faith in Christ that we receive the promise of the Spirit and enjoy the blessing of Abraham.

## A ratified contract

- **Brothers (I speak according to a man), in the same way of a man, no man annuls or adds to a contract that has been ratified** (Galatians 3:15).

Paul now begins to compare the promises to Abraham with the law of Moses in order to show how the law could not supersede those promises. He first reminds them about human contracts. Once contracts have been ratified, they cannot be annulled or added to without creating a new contract. For example, a man’s will cannot be annulled or added to without making a new will.

## Abraham’s promised seed is Christ

- **Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, who is Christ** (Galatians 3:16).

Paul explains here how the seed mentioned in that covenant did not refer to all of Abraham's descendants. It referred only to Christ. It referred to him because the word seed in that covenant is singular not plural. Hence, the promises were spoke to Abraham and to his one seed, the one seed of promise, which is Jesus Christ. For the promise of our salvation is only through Christ.

Remember, that promise says, **“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).

### The law does not annul the promise

- **And I say this, a covenant previously confirmed by God in Christ, the law, which happened four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul in order to make the promise useless. For if the inheritance is from law, it is no longer from promise. But God has given it to Abraham through promise** (Galatians 3:17-18).

Paul had just explained how a ratified contract cannot be annulled or added to. He now shows how that is also true of the contract or covenant that God made with Abraham. Thus, the law of Moses could not change his covenant with Abraham.

The inheritance is the promised blessing that through the seed of Abraham all the nations would be blessed. Paul next explains why the law was introduced.

### Law was added on account of sin

- **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. Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one** (Galatians 3:19-20).

Very few people realize that all the law of Moses was not something God originally wanted to give to his people Israel. For Jehovah said about them, **“Moreover I also gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they will not live”** (Ezekiel 20:25).

Paul said the law was only added **“on account of transgressions.”** If the law was so important, then why was not Abraham given the law? If the law was so important, then why are we not still under the law? The law was added because the people of Israel were so rebellious.

Legal systems are necessary when people lack the desire within them to be righteous. That is why we, the disciples of Christ, need no law with God. We are freed from a legal system with him. We are under the law of liberty, which is not a legal system. I speak much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

The law of Moses was added in Israel because of their sinfulness. And it remained until the promised seed of Abraham came, which seed is Christ. And now with his good news of our salvation, and the establishment of the kingdom of God, the church, the law is no longer necessary for the people of God. All we need is the wisdom that comes from the word of God to tell us how to live righteously.

Paul also said the law of Moses **“was arranged through agents in the hand of a mediator.”** The Son of God was that mediator. And he used his agents, both from heaven and those upon the earth to arrange the law for the people of Israel. When Stephen was giving his defense before the council of the Jews, among many things he said to them was that they **“received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it”** (Acts 7:53).

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was the mediator between God the Father and the people of Israel. Before Christ came into the world he was called in the Old Testament by the name Jehovah. Remember what Paul said to the Corinthians: **“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).

## Law cannot make alive

- **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** (Galatians 3:21).

The law was added because of transgressions, but that does not mean it was against the promises of God. A little farther down Paul explains how the law was like a schoolmaster for Christ. It served a temporary purpose, which was to oversee God’s people to keep them from becoming totally pagan.

It was temporary because no law can make alive. No law can make a people righteous. No law can keep a people uncondemned in the sight of God. Only faith in Jesus Christ can make alive. Only faith in Jesus Christ can make a people righteous. That faith makes them righteous because it enables Christ to redeem them, and it also makes them want to be righteous. And those things qualify their spirits to inherit eternal life.

Law—legal systems—only require obedience to statutes and ordinances. What kind of heart a man has makes no difference as long as he obeys. But no man has the ability to live in perfect obedience, no man except for Jesus Christ the Son of God. Moreover, when people are motivated by legal systems alone, and not the desire for righteousness, they always eventually become corrupt and lawless.

Legal systems cannot make alive. It is the character of a people and not legal systems that cause righteousness. That is why the American people have become more corrupt and lawless after they chose to forsake God and his righteousness. They have become more corrupt and lawless even though many more laws have been legislated.

## Scripture confined all things under sin

- **But the scripture confined all things under sin, so that the promise from faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came we were kept in custody under law, having been confined for faith that was going to be revealed (Galatians 3:22-23).**

The words “the scripture” in that passage must refer to the law, because the passage says “we were kept in custody under law, confined for faith that was going to be revealed.” Remember, the word law can sometimes include the working of our conscience, as this passage says, “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, “the scripture” in the above passage in Galatians probably refers to “**the work of the law written in [our] hearts,**” as well as law written in documents. Therefore, the words, “**But the scripture confined all things under sin**” apparently mean the same thing as this passage: “**For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all**” (Romans 11:32).

We have been confined in disobedience (under sin) because no man, except for the Son of God, does not sin. Every man is confined in a body of flesh, which then compels him (because of the weakness of the flesh) to be disobedient to God at sometime, violating his conscience. Thus, all men are confined in disobedience. And since God has given mankind power over all things in the world (see Genesis 1:28), then all things are confined under sin, because all things are subject to the power of sinful man.

Paul wrote more about such things in his letter to the Romans. Here are two passages of what he said about our being confined under sin by the law:

**For the law works wrath. For where there is no law, neither is there transgression. Because of this it is from faith ...** (Romans 4:15-16).

**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 7:6).

## Kept in custody under law before faith

- **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 3:24-26).**

Before Christ came mankind was judged according to the fundamental laws of good and evil, which laws are inherited in our consciences from birth. Remember how Paul spoke about that (see Romans 2:14-16). Of course, the Israelites also had the law of Moses.

Those laws were our schoolmaster before Christ came. They taught us the difference between right and wrong. However, now that Christ has come we are made righteous from faith in him. We are no longer judged by our knowledge of right and wrong. We are judge by our faith in Christ. Which faith makes us all sons of God. And that faith, genuine faith in him, makes us repent of our sins, and trust and obey him.

Consequently, God no longer judges us by any legal system of laws. He judges us by our trust and faith in his Son Jesus Christ. Nevertheless remember, it must be a genuine faith in him. And genuine faith always causes us to strive to live righteously. For 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. He who claims to abide in him he also ought so to walk just as that man walked”** (First John 2:3-6).

## Being immersed into Christ

- **For as many as were immersed into Christ have put on Christ** (Galatians 3:27).

The immersion Paul spoke about was the immersion in water for the remission of sins. And that is how we put on Christ. There are numerous passages in the New Testament that testify to the necessity of being immersed in water to put on Christ.

For examples, Peter said 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). Jesus said to Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). And he said to his disciples after his resurrection, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved, but he who does not believe will be damned”** (Mark 16:16). Peter also said in his first letter, **“... 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 ...”** (First Peter 3:20-21).

Also let no man persuade you that all those commands about the necessity of immersion refer to being immersed in the Holy Spirit. Being immersed in the Holy Spirit is something that happens to us. It is not something we can do. Moreover, being immersed in the Holy Spirit is not a result of our faith only. For Jesus said that he who believes *and* is immersed will be saved. He did not say that he who believes will be immersed in the Holy Spirit. He said, **“He who believes and is immersed will be saved ... .”**

And if you want more evidence that we must be immersed in water, consider what the book of Acts says about Philip: **“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).

Refusing to be immersed in water for the remission of sins is rebellion against the command of Christ. It is so simple and easy, why refuse? If you do, what will you say to the Lord on the day of judgment? Remember the parable about the wedding, where a man was cast out because he lacked a wedding garment. Do not think it could not happen to you if you refuse to be properly immersed to put on Christ? Nevertheless be warned, the devil and those deceived by him will do all they can to discourage you.

## We are all one in Christ Jesus

- **There is no Jew nor Greek, there is no bondman nor freeman, there is no male and female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:28).

And once we put on Christ, in the sight of God our station in this life is irrelevant. It matters not whether we are a Jew or a Greek (meaning Gentile); it matters not whether we are a bondman or a freeman; it matters not whether we are a male or a female. We are all equally children of God, being one in Christ Jesus.

Now that does not mean our station in this life can be disregarded. As long as we are in this world, we must accept whatever station in life God gives us. Although we are free from law with God, we are not free from law with men, not as long as we are in this world.

## Heirs according to promise

- **And if ye are Christ’s, then ye are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to promise** (Galatians 3:29).

Remember, Jesus was the seed of God’s promise to Abraham. And when we put on Christ we become one with him. For Paul said, **“Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:27).

Therefore, we are heirs with Christ. For Paul said to the Roman brothers, **“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).

## When we were 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. And so when we were children, we were in bondage under the rudiments of the world. But when**

**the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born from a woman, born under law, so that he might redeem those under law, so that we might receive the sonship** (Galatians 4:1-5).

Children are always under supervision, even children who have inherited great wealth. For children who inherit wealth are never given that wealth until the time appointed by their father. They remain under supervision while they are children. And so is our inheritance with Christ.

There are two ways we can interpret what Paul says about our being in bondage under the rudiments of the world when we were children. His use of children can refer to mankind before the coming of Christ, or it can refer to each one of us individually. And I believe both meanings apply to what he is saying.

Before the coming of Christ mankind was under the judgment of the fundamental laws of good and evil, the knowledge of which we are all born with (although it takes a while to mature in the child). Those laws are rudiments of the world, and all men were in subjection to them, in bondage to them. And we are all condemned by them because we all sin; for none of us avoid violating them, more or less. And that causes our death, our spiritual death.

But when Christ came he freed us from them, as Paul said, **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and of death”** (Romans 8:2). Christ freed us by redeeming us from our guilt. It was necessary for him to redeem us, because those laws of good and evil resulted in our condemnation, the condemnation of all men. Those laws are good, but we were not able to keep from breaking some of them, consequently causing our condemnation. Thus, the world was subject to the law of sin and of death, but Christ freed us from it.

Christ was able to redeem us by being born into the world as a man and being subject to the laws of good and evil; moreover, he was given many commands by God the Father. And because Jesus never broke any of those laws, nor did he ever disobey any of God’s commands, then God rewarded him with the right to redeem the world from condemnation. And that gives all men the opportunity to receive the sonship, the sonship of God. However, that sonship can only come to those who believe and obey Christ.

## We are sons of God

- **And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou are no longer a bondman but a son, and if a son, then an heir through Christ** (Galatians 4:6-7).

If you love all things that are good and right and just; if you love truth and righteousness; if you love God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself; if you have committed your life to Jesus, believing and obeying him, striving to bear fruit for righteousness; then the Spirit of Jesus Christ the Son of God is in your heart. And as Jesus did, so you too can cry, Abba, Father.

You can call God your Father because you are one of his children. He has adopted you. And that means you too are an heir through Christ. That means you too will inherit glory and honor in heaven with Christ as sons of God for eternity.

Dear reader, there is no greater blessing than to become a son of God with Christ. Rejoice if you are one of his faithful disciples. But wail if you are not, because you will not only miss that blessing but you will suffer the fires of hell because of your sins.

## Bondage to those that are not gods

- **But of course then, not knowing God, ye were in bondage to those that are by nature not gods** (Galatians 4:8).

When those Gentiles were ignorant of God and his will for us, they were slaves of their spiritual darkness about him. They groped in the darkness of their ignorance, and worshipped things that are not gods. Those idols they pay homage to and worship as gods are by their very nature no gods at all. They are simply cleverly formed blocks of stone, metal, and wood.

And it is sad to know that such destitute things are still venerated and worshiped. The members of the Catholic church bow down and worship many idols. People who believe in Buddhism and Hinduism worship other kinds of idols. When I and my wife took a trip to Asia several years ago, we were invited to bow down and pay homage to one of their idols. We were the only ones in our tour group (of people from Asia) who refused. Such foolish people insist on having something they can see and touch to worship.

Moreover, throughout history men have paid homage and worshiped men who (like all men) are not gods. Remember what Paul said to the idol worshipers of Lystra who thought he and Barnabas were gods because he healed a paralyzed man: **“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 ...”** (Acts 14:15).

Before the Japanese lost the war with us, they considered their emperor Hirohito to be a god. But we freed them from that bondage by showing that he was only a man, because he was powerless against us. Nevertheless, some of them still worship idols. And as a people they have not yet accepted the divinity of Jesus Christ, recognizing the enlightenment of the word of God.

## Wanting again to be in bondage anew

- **But now knowing God, but rather being known by God, how is it ye turn again to the weak and destitute elements to which ye desire again to be in bondage anew? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest somehow I have labored toward you in vain** (Galatians 4:9-11).

Paul said that knowing God means being known by God. When we learn about God and acknowledge him, accepting him in our heart as our God through Jesus Christ, then God

also recognizes and acknowledges us. He puts his Holy Spirit in us and adopts us to be one of his very sons.

Paul wanted to know how those foolish Christians in Galatia could then turn again to those vain things that kept them in bondage. He called those things weak and destitute elements. All of the things that men worship and serve as deity, instead of the true God, are weak and destitute elements. They are elements because they are simple material things. They are weak and destitute because they have no power. There has never been an idol that did anything for anyone.

Moreover, those foolish Galatians wanted to turn again to the impotency of the laws of Moses. Remember, Paul spoke of “... **the impotence of the law, in that it was weak because of the flesh ...**” (Romans 8:3). The law was good, but alone it is impotent against sin. Our human nature is too strong to keep us from violating laws. I explain those things much more in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Paul gave the example of observing special times. There is nothing wrong with observing special times, as long as they are not obligatory, as long as they do not become laws. Days like the sabbath of the law of Moses are no longer required of us. Yet some people want to cling to such things and condemn all who do not observe such days.

When Paul said he was afraid of them, he probably meant he was afraid they would become apostate and promote things against the good news of Christ. That very thing happened in the early church after the time of the apostles. The major result of which is the Catholic church, which is filled with perverse doctrines promoting the kind of weak and destitute elements Paul condemned.

Paul feared his labor toward them was in vain. Yet he did not quit trying. This very letter is evidence of that. And we too should not quit trying to promote the truth of the good news of Christ just because there is some backsliding. We cannot give up until it becomes completely hopeless.

Remember what the record says about Jehovah and his people Israel when they became so very sinful: “**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 36:15-16).

## Being like each other

- **I beseech you, brothers, become like me, because I also am like ye** (Galatians 4:12).

Paul did not want those humble Gentile Christians to think he was a different kind of man. Remember what he said to the people of Lystra: “**We also are men of like nature with you, proclaiming good news to you ...**” (Acts 14:15). Instead, he wanted them to become like him. He wanted them to become like him in the sense of being a faithful disciple of Christ, without being lured away into some foolish new doctrine.

## Paul's weakness of the flesh

- **Ye wronged me in nothing. 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 4:12-15).

Paul was not criticizing them for anything personal. They never wronged him about anything. Instead, when he first preached the good news to them, they received him as an agent from heaven, even as Christ Jesus himself. And that was even though he preached to them with a weakness of the flesh. They did not disdain him because of that weakness, nor did they reject his trial in his flesh. They were too pleased with him and his preaching.

The book of Acts gives a brief history of some of the deeds of the apostles, including some of the works of Paul. However, it only mentions two times when Paul passed through the region of Galatia (Acts 16:6 and 18:23). It says nothing else about Galatia. However, this letter shows he did work there and was successful in converting some of them.

Remember, Paul not only preached, but he also performed signs and wonders to prove the good news of Christ was from God. As the record says about the Jerusalem conference, **“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).

Paul's weakness of the flesh was probably poor vision, because he said they were so pleased with him that they would have willingly sacrificed their own eyes for him. There is another passage in this letter that provides evidence he had poor vision: **“See in how large letters I wrote to you with my hand”** (Galatians 6:11).

## Speaking truth makes enemies

- **“So then have I become your enemy telling you the truth?”** (Galatians 4:16).

It is sad but true that the world often becomes the enemy of those who tell the truth. The greatest example of that is our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, because Jesus told the truth about himself and about God, the people considered him their enemy and they crucified him.

The history of the world has shown that the prophets of God were all considered enemies because they spoke the truth. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **“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”** (Matthew 23:29-31).

And remember what Stephen said to the rulers of the Jews: **“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 7:52-53).**

In contrast, every soul who genuinely believes in Christ and his good news, loves the truth. And we reject no man who speaks truth to us, genuine truth. However, in this dark world genuine truth is often difficult to separate from the deceitfulness of error. Therefore, we must always be cautious and confirm the genuineness of truth before we accept what is presented to us. And our standard for truth is the Holy Bible, the word of God.

We should be exceedingly grateful that the Bible is now so freely available to us. Always remembering that we are going to be judged by what we have been given. And that means no modern American has any excuse not to read and believe that magnificent book.

### Being zealous about them

- **They are zealous for you but not honorably. They want to exclude you, so that ye may be zealous for them. But to be zealous of is always good in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you (Galatians 4:17-18).**

When ambitious men need the support of people, they are commonly zealous for them. Perhaps the most noticeable modern example is political campaigning. Often such zeal for the people is not honorable, but motivated by selfish ambition. They want to gain power and be elevated above the people so that the people will be zealous for them.

Jesus condemned such selfish ambition among us in the kingdom of God. He commanded against it, saying, **“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).**

Nevertheless, it was not long after the time of the apostles when such men began seizing power in the congregations, elevating themselves above the other believers. For example, they created the office of Bishop where one man has absolute authority in spiritual things over several congregations. Other examples are the offices of priest and pastor. Such positions divide believers into the classes of clergy and laity, where the clergy have power and elevated status above the other members. And they expect to be called things like father and reverend. Such men are serving the devil not God.

Paul said it was always good to be zealous of in a good thing. For Paul himself was very zealous for Christ and his church, especially for those Gentile congregations that he established. And that zealousness for them continued even when he was absent from them. It was an honorable zealousness, where he genuinely strove for their welfare, not his own.

Remember what he said to the Corinthians: **“Already ye are filled. Already ye have become rich. Ye reigned without us, and O that ye did indeed reign, so that we also might reign with you. 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 4:8-13).

### Paul was perplexed at them

- **My little children, of whom I suffer birth pains again until Christ is formed in you. But I was wishing to be present with you now and to change my tone, because I am perplexed at you** (Galatians 4:19-20).

Those disciples in Galatia had regressed so far from the good news of Christ, that Paul said they were not even babes in Christ. They were still at the stage of becoming babes, because he was still suffering birth pains about them. Christ had not yet been formed in them because their knowledge about him and his good news of salvation was so immature and undeveloped.

Peter spoke about being babes in Christ, 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). Those Christians in Galatia were not even ready for the genuine intellectual milk of the good news because of their immature knowledge of Christ.

Therefore, Paul was perplexed at them. He had taught them well, but they had severely regressed from his teaching. They were turning again to **“the weak and destitute elements”** to which they desired again to be in bondage anew. They were regressing from their liberty in Christ to the bondage of legalisms.

Paul wanted to be present with them and to change his tone. He was no doubt confident that were he there with them he could return them to the truth of Christ. And then he could change his tone with them, away from criticizing and rebuking to teaching and encouraging.

### The servant girl and the freewoman

- **Tell me those desiring to be under law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one from the servant girl, and one from the freewoman. But in fact, the man from the servant girl was born according to flesh, but the man from the freewoman through promise** (Galatians 4:21-23).

Abraham had been promised by God to have a son. Yet he and his wife Sarah kept getting older without ever having a son. Therefore, Sarah suggested that perhaps God would use her handmaid Hagar to give Abraham a son. For the record says, **“And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, Jehovah has restrained me from bearing. Go in, I pray thee, to my handmaid. It may be that I will obtain sons by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid,**

after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife.

**“And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. ... And Hagar bore Abram a son. And Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram”** (Genesis 16:2-4, 15-16).

However, Ishmael was not the son of God’s promise, because the record says, **“And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shall not call her name Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. And I will bless her. And moreover I will give thee a son by her. Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be by her.**

**“Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born to him who is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said to God, Oh that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, No, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shall call his name Isaac. And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him”** (Genesis 17:15-19).

Notice how Paul referred to the entire Old Testament as the law. Jesus also did that several times. For example he said to his apostles about his being rejected by the Jews, **“But, that the word that is written in their law may be fulfilled, They hated me without cause”** (John 15:25). That prophecy is written in the psalms, not the law of Moses.

### The two covenants allegorized

- **Which things are allegorized, for these are two covenants, indeed one from mount Sinai giving birth for bondage, which is Hagar. For Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and it corresponds to the present Jerusalem, and is in bondage with her children.**
- **But the Jerusalem above is free, which is mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren woman not giving birth. Burst forth and shout, thou not suffering birth pains, because many more are the children of the desolate than of her who has the husband.**
- **Now we, brothers, who correspond to Isaac, are children of promise** (Galatians 4:24-28).

From the very beginning God’s promises to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, referred to the Christ. Remember, Paul said, **“Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, who is Christ”** (Galatians 3:16).

The Hebrew race of Abraham was used as the medium through which Christ was born, and through which the Bible was written. However, the Hebrew race, with their law of Moses that was given to them at mount Sinai, was not the seed of God’s promise. The biological offspring of Abraham, the Hebrew race, the nation of Israel whose capital city is Jerusalem, actually corresponds to the servant girl Hagar. For they are in bondage to the

law of Moses. While we, the disciples of Christ, are free from a legal system with God. God has adopted us to be his sons. We are no longer bondmen, but sons, with all the rights and privileges of sons, sons of God.

The Jerusalem from above is the new Jerusalem of heaven. For the apostle John, in his vision of heaven, said, **“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”** (Revelation 21:2).

The passage Paul quoted is from the prophet Isaiah: **“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”** (Isaiah 54:1). That passage follows the famous passage in Isaiah that prophesies what Christ would be like, and how men would treat him.

As Paul said, that passage about the barren woman refers to the new Jerusalem in heaven. The new Jerusalem is our mother in a figurative sense. All of her children are adopted because that great city would have remained empty and barren if it were not for the great sacrifice of Jesus that enabled him to redeem us. And having been redeemed, God then adopted us to be his sons.

For remember, Paul said, **“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”** (Romans 8:14-16).

Thus, as with Isaac, Abraham’s son of promise, we too are children of promise, because God promised to bless all who believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. Here is one passage from the book of Revelation that tells of that great promise: **“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.**

**“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).

## Being according to flesh or to Spirit

- **But just as then, the man who was born according to flesh persecuted the man according to Spirit, so also now. Nevertheless, what does the scripture say? Send away the servant girl and her son, for the son of the servant girl will, no, not inherit with the son of the freewoman. So then, brothers, we are not children of a servant girl, but of the freewoman** (Galatians 4:29-31).

Ishmael was Abraham's son by Hagar, and he persecuted the young child Isaac. Here is how the record tells it: **“And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made me to laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham, that Sarah should give sons suck? For I have borne him a son in his old age. And the child grew, and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.**

**“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. Therefore she said to Abraham, Cast out this handmaid and her son. For the son of this handmaid shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight on account of his son. And God said to Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy handmaid. In all that Sarah says to thee, hearken to her voice. For in Isaac shall thy seed be called”** (Genesis 21:5-12).

Although Abraham was grieved because of Sarah's desire to cast out Hagar and her son Ishmael, God supported what Sarah wanted. Therefore, God commanded Abraham to hearken to Sarah and send away Hagar and Ishmael. For his promise to Abraham was through Isaac not Ishmael. Moreover, as Paul said, and the Old Testament record indicates, Ishmael persecuted Isaac, mocking him.

And those according to flesh continue to persecute those according to Spirit. They crucified the very son of promise, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and they persecute his disciples. Nevertheless, those according to flesh will never inherit the promises of God.

Therefore, remember passages like this one: **“If therefore ye were raised with the Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Think on the things above, not the things on the earth. For ye died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God. When the Christ, our life, is made known, then ye also will be made known with him in glory”** (Colossians 3:1-4).

## Stand firm in the liberty

- **Stand firm therefore in the liberty in which Christ freed us, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage** (Galatians 5:1).

As I have said before, so I say again: God never intended to entangle his people Israel in a yoke of bondage with all those detailed laws of Moses. He first gave them the simple ten commandments and a few others about justice. But then he added so many others that the law became a yoke of bondage to them. He added them because of their continual rebellion against him.

As the record in the book of Ezekiel says, **“And I said to their sons in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers. Neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am Jehovah your God. Walk in my statutes, and keep my ordinances, and do them, and hallow my sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am Jehovah your God.**

**“But the sons rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes, nor kept my ordinances to do them, which if a man does, he shall live in them. They profaned my sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them, to accomplish my**

anger against them in the wilderness. Nevertheless I withdrew my hand, and worked for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them forth.

**“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. And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that opens the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 20:18-26).

Jehovah gave them **“statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they will not live.”** Now that does not literally mean all of his statutes and ordinances for them were not good. Those laws were not good for them because they composed a legal system, which is impossible for any man (except the Son of God) to keep perfectly. As Paul confessed, **“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”** (Romans 7:15-16). All those statutes and ordinances of the law of Moses were a yoke of bondage that they could not keep.

Remember what Peter said when some Jewish Christians had insisted the Gentile Christians must obey the laws of Moses: **“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).

All those statutes and ordinances of the law of Moses were a yoke of bondage that the Israelites could not keep. Consequently, they could not live by them, meaning to remain free from guilt. God polluted them in their gifts of sacrifices, including the first born of their beasts (the clean ones) which they burnt on the altar. The Israelites were polluted by them because they kept transgressing his laws about them. Therefore, by their transgressions he made them desolate, meaning condemned for their sins. I explain those things much more in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

No man can be made righteous in the sight of God by works of law. It is only through faith and obedience to his Son Jesus Christ that we can be saved from the condemnation of our sins. For when we put on Christ we are redeemed from them and become under the law of liberty with God.

## Fallen from grace

- **Behold, I Paul say to you, that if ye are circumcised, Christ will benefit you nothing. 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 5:2-4).

What Paul meant by being circumcised was being initiated into the law of Moses. And when that happens it commits a man to obey the whole law, every one of them, every statute and ordinance that comprises that yoke of bondage. And when a man does that he becomes discharged from the Christ. He is no longer a disciple; he is no longer a child of God.

The law is a way to be made righteous by works only; faith is not even required. And every disciple who does that becomes fallen from grace. God gives him no grace; he is on his own; he must earn his salvation by works only. Christ will not redeem him.

## Faith working through love

- **For we through the Spirit, from faith, wait for a hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love** (Galatians 5:5-6).

We live in a very sinful, unjust, and unrighteous world. Indeed, the ruler of the world is the devil himself. For Jesus said just before his trial and crucifixion, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31). Satan was cast out of heaven at the completion of Jesus’ life of sinless sacrifice for God the Father.

Here is what the record says happened in heaven when Jesus died upon the cross, which culminated his life of perfect obedience to God: **“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 12:10-12).

Therefore, we wait for a hope of righteousness, which will happen to all who believe and obey Jesus Christ. For our future life is in heaven with God and Christ.

And we wait through the Spirit from faith. Because of our faith God has put his Holy Spirit in us. We know it is there because of the testimony of his holy word, the Bible. And we can feel it in our conscience as we feel compelled to live righteously and bear the fruits of good works for him. And with that Spirit in us we wait for a hope of righteousness, knowing by faith that it will happen. For our righteousness is by faith working through love.

Therefore, things like circumcision no longer avail anything with God. He first gave that covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants about four thousand years ago. However, with the coming of the promised seed, our Lord Jesus Christ, things like circumcision no longer avail anything. What God wants of us is to love him, trust him, have faith in him.

And we must use our faith in him to live righteously and fruitfully through a spirit of love. For remember, we will be judged by our works (the works based upon our faith), as John

reported from this part of his vision of heaven: **“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 hindered you?

- **Ye were running well. Who hindered you, not to obey the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence toward you in the Lord, that ye will think no other thing. But the man who troubles you will bear the verdict, whoever he may be** (Galatians 5:7-10).

Paul did not know who it was that had persuaded them to turn from the truth of Christ and accept some other good news, which, as Paul said, **“is not another, except there are some who confuse you, and who want to pervert the good news of the Christ”** (Galatians 1:7). Whatever it was that had drawn them away was not from Jesus Christ our Lord, he who had called them through the preaching of Paul to his good news of salvation.

Whoever the man was, Paul said he would bear the verdict. The man had already been judged; what remained was his punishment, which Paul said he would bear. What that punishment was, and when it would be applied is not told. Nevertheless, even if the man repented, he would suffer some kind of punishment because he troubled the congregation. Remember, the book of Hebrews says, **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens. And he whips every son whom he receives”** (Hebrews 12:6). And when we sin we are going to be chastened, even if we repent. Repentance is not a way to escape all punishment.

Paul used the illustration of leaven to show how a small influence in a group can cause a major change in it. Paul also used that illustration in his letter to the brothers at Corinth when he spoke about the man who had his father’s wife. He said to them, **“Know ye not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”** (First Corinthians 5:6).

A small influence can have a major effect on a group, either for good or for evil. Leaven in dough has a good influence. And that is the kind of influence we should have. For remember what Jesus said about that: **“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).

Paul was confident about them in the Lord, that they would **“think no other thing.”** Although Paul was rebuking them because of their tolerance of other doctrines, he still had confidence they would be true to the good news of Christ. After learning what Paul was teaching them, they would think no other thing but the truth of Christ. Their hearts were right, but they had been “bewitched” temporarily away from the truth.

## The stumbling-block of the cross

- **But I, brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling-block of the cross has been abolished (Galatians 5:11).**

The Bible record shows how much the Jews persecuted Paul. They persecuted him because they thought he was their enemy. Remember how they accused him 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.**

**“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. And while seeking to kill him, a report went up to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem has been stirred up” (Acts 21:27-31).**

If Paul had been making Jewish proselytes by requiring them to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses he would not have been persecuted. That would have abolished the requirement that they only obey the good news of Christ. That requirement was the stumbling-block for the Jews. They could not give up their trust in the law of Moses to accept faith in Christ and obedience to him. And after almost two thousand years they still cannot give it up, those few of them who still believe in God.

## Those who trouble them

- **O that those who trouble you would even cut it all off (Galatians 5:12).**

Those Jews were so full of hatred for the good news of Christ that they were a constant cause of trouble to those Gentile Christians. Using irony, Paul expressed the wish that those fanatical Jews would go all the way and emasculate themselves. Instead of simply having their foreskins cut off, let them cut the entire organ off. Let them turn their fanaticism against themselves instead of against the body of Christ.

Remember, Jesus commanded us to bless those who curse us and hate us and mistreat us and persecuted us. However, Jesus never commanded us to bless those who strive to pervert and destroy our faith in the truth of God. Remember what he said to those evil scholars and Pharisees: **“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).**

Before Paul was converted to Christ he too was under the curse of God because of his vicious opposition to Christ and his disciples. But he received mercy because he was not a

hypocrite. For he said, “**And I have gratitude to the Christ—Jesus our Lord—who empowered me, because he considered me faithful, having placed in service the man who was formerly blasphemous, and a persecutor, and an aggressor. But I obtained mercy because I did it being ignorant in unbelief**” (First Timothy 1:12-13).

## We were called to liberty

- **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).

God through Christ has called us to freedom from legalism with him; he has given us the liberty to decide for ourselves how to live. We have liberty as long as it is not used to indulge the lusts of our flesh, but rather is used to serve him and each other through love. And we learn how to do that by studying his holy word, the Bible.

As Paul said, the essence of the law is for us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We can gain some wisdom about how best to live from some parts of the law, but we are not bound by it in every circumstance. If it is more beneficial in the sight of God for us to ignore a law, then we have that liberty.

For example, the law of Moses says we should rest on the seventh day of each week. And that principle of having one day of rest each week is a good one. However, we are not bound to it. We have the liberty of working for more days at times when it would be more beneficial.

Nevertheless remember, we are still bound by the laws of men.

## Be not consumed by each other

- **But if ye bite and devour each other, watch out that ye be not consumed by each other** (Galatians 5:15).

Biting and devouring each other is the opposite of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Paul’s use of the words bite and devour refer to any kind of aggressive and hostile behavior toward each other. And that kind of behavior is very destructive to the unity of any group. Like a malignant cancer in the body, or like a fire, it will consume the group and eventually destroy it.

## Flesh and Spirit 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 what ye may want, these things ye should not do** (Galatians 5:16-17).

The Spirit of God within us and our flesh are hostile to each other. That is why the Spirit of God within us wants to do things that our flesh does not want, and our flesh wants to do

things that the Spirit of God within us does not want. The reason for the hostility between the Spirit of God within us and our flesh is because our flesh is corrupted. We inherit that corruption because of the sin of Adam. Even the body of Jesus had it, but he never allowed it to cause him to sin.

Regarding that corruption, consider what God said after the great flood: **“And Jehovah said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake, for that the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). And Solomon said, **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”** (Proverbs 22:15).

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child because the imagination of our hearts is evil from out youth. The imagination of our hearts is evil because of our premature knowledge of good and evil, which we inherited from the sin of Adam. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The Spirit of God within us wants to do things that are good and right and just. While our flesh wants to do things that are foolish, sinful, and wicked. Therefore, they are hostile to each other. Consequently, if we walk in the Spirit we will no, not fulfill a lust of the flesh, we will not act foolish, sinful, and wicked.

## Led by the Spirit and not under law

- **But if ye are led by the Spirit ye are not under law** (Galatians 5:18).

Those who are led by their flesh are under law, and they will be judged strictly by God’s laws of right and wrong. However, we who are led by the Spirit of God are not under a legal system with him.

Those who are led by their flesh are under condemnation because of their sins. However, we who are led by the Spirit of God have been redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. And we are no longer judged by a strict legal system with God. We are now his children, chastened when we offend him, but not condemned—as long as we continually strive to walk in the Spirit of God.

## The works of the flesh

- **Now the works of the flesh are apparent, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strifes, jealousies, wraths, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envyings, murders, intoxications, revelings, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, as I also did forewarn, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God** (Galatians 5:19-21).

Paul now gives examples of the evil works of the flesh, acts of foolishness, sinfulness, and wickedness, which I list below:

adultery  
fornication  
uncleanness

licentiousness  
idolatry  
sorcery  
hatreds  
strifes  
jealousies  
wraths  
selfish ambitions  
dissensions  
factions  
envyings  
murders  
intoxications  
revelings  
and things like these

Adultery is the sin of sexual intimacy committed by or with a man or woman married to someone else. That sin is widely condemned throughout the world. I have never heard of any place it is tolerated—except where the people have reached the lowest stage of moral degeneracy. Indeed, adultery was a capital crime in the law of Moses.

Fornication can refer to any kind of sexual sin, including adultery. However, Paul here uses the word to refer to sexual intimacy between unmarried persons. God has commanded that sexual intimacy be only in the marriage relationship. Anything else is a sin.

Unlike adultery, fornication is widely tolerated throughout the world. Nevertheless, Paul warned against it, when he said, **“Flee fornication. Every sin, whatever a man may do, is outside the body, but he who fornicates sins against his own body”** (First Corinthians 6:18). Be wise and heed that warning.

Uncleanness can refer to a host of things. Uncleanness of any kind can be a threat to us. However, in this world it is impossible to avoid every kind of uncleanness. Many occupations require exposure to some kind of uncleanness, but even then the uncleanness should always be temporary. Enjoying or indulging in uncleanness is a sure sign of moral degeneracy.

Spiritual uncleanness refers to any kind of sinful behavior. Remember what Jesus said about what defiles us: **“Not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles the man”** (Matthew 15:11). He was referring to evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnessings, revilings.

Licentiousness refers to unrestricted behavior. Licentiousness is opposite to civilized behavior. It is characteristic of wildness and disorder. Those who indulge the lusts of their flesh act licentiously. Drunkenness always produces licentiousness, which is why it is so dangerous. Only fools indulge in licentiousness, and only fools tolerate it.

Idolatry refers specifically to the worship of idols. However, in its broadest sense it can refer to the worship of anything besides the true and living God. And that includes greed, because Paul said to the congregation at Colossae, **“Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry”** (Colossians 3:5).

Sorcery is a special kind of deceit. It claims supernatural powers. But sorcery has never had supernatural powers. Those who claim those powers use illusions to deceive people into believing them. God has always condemned sorcery. It too was a capital crime in the law of Moses. It is not the harmless thing that the world claims it is. Never associate with any kind of sorcery.

Hatreds is another evil work of the flesh. And it is characteristic of sinners. For they are full of contempt toward many forms of truth and righteousness. They are full of hatreds toward them. They hate God and Christ; they hate virtue and scoff at it; they mock and deny truth. Hate is a large part of their character. Just speak truth and righteousness to them, and you will experience their hate.

Nevertheless, it is not wrong to hate some things. God himself hates many things. Here is one passage that tells of some things he hates: **“For thus says Jehovah of hosts: ... These are the things that ye shall do: Speak ye every man the truth with his neighbor. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates. And let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbor, and love no false oath. For all these are things that I hate, says Jehovah”** (Zechariah 8:14-17).

Strifes refer to conflicts and quarrels. And they too are a characteristic of those who live according to the flesh. Indeed, they love strifes. They enjoy them and consider them to be entertaining. That is why there is so much violence in the modern TV and movie shows, and in the books they read.

The only kind of strife that God approves is strife against sin and wickedness. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“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).

That kind of righteous strife is necessary to eliminate harmful strife and bring lasting peace. Otherwise evil and strife continue to multiply and destroy. Farmers must sometimes burn a field of thorns and thistles in order to grow useful crops. Our goal should always be peace and unity, but sometimes that can only occur with some strife. In contrast, the goal of sinners is strife itself.

When Paul listed jealousies he was referring to excessive and abusive jealousies. For there is good jealousy and bad jealousy. Indeed, the Bible says that God is a jealous God. Consider the first two of the ten commandments: **“Thou shall have no other gods before me. 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, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”** (Exodus 20:3-6).

Jealousy is evil when it becomes excessive and abusive. Jealousy is evil when it is full of suspicion and unwarranted distrust. Jealousy is evil when it destroys love and causes injustice.

Like jealousy, wrath is only wrong when it is used wrongfully. Like jealousy, the Bible speaks of the wrath of God. Here is only one example: **“Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of which the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience, in which ye also once walked when ye lived in them. But now ye also, put off all these things: anger, wrath, wickedness, reviling, filthy speaking out of your mouth”** (Colossians 3:5-8).

Wrath is a more extreme or intense form of anger. There is no sin in wrath or anger, but Paul told how it must be properly controlled: **“Be ye angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give a place to the devil”** (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Anger is an emotion. And emotions arouse us to action. Therefore, anger can actually be good, if it serves a good purpose. However, as Paul said, it should not arouse us to sin. It should never take control of us and cause us to act foolishly by not using good judgment. Moreover, since wrath is the more extreme form of anger, it should not last past the end of the day. When that happens it can actually turn against us, and cause harm to our health.

Ambition is a strong desire to succeed or achieve some goal. Selfish ambition causes a man to be ruthless toward others in his competition with them. Therefore, it is especially harmful. For James warned, **“But if ye have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast, and do not lie against the truth. This wisdom is not descending from above, but is earthly, world-soul, demonic. For where envy and selfish ambition are, there is instability and every evil deed”** (James 3:14-16).

However, ambition for righteousness is a great virtue. Jesus was ambitious to serve his Father in heaven. Consider this passage: **“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 4:31-34).

Paul also said, **“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”** (First Corinthians 9:24). Therefore, be ambitious for things like truth and righteousness, because only those kinds of things enable us to receive the prize, the prize of our reward in heaven. Paul also said about himself, **“I press forward toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. As many therefore as are perfect should think this way. And if ye think anything differently, this also God will reveal to you”** (Philippians 3:14-15).

Dissensions refer to disagreements, which are about divided thinking. The danger of dissensions is that they can turn people away from each other, especially if there are many dissensions. Frequent and unrestrained dissensions are characteristic of sinners.

Therefore, Paul encouraged us to think the same way, in oneness: **“If therefore any exhortation is in Christ, if any encouragement of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill my joy, that ye may think the same way, having the same love, being knit in soul, thinking in oneness, in nothing according to selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility considering each other surpassing yourselves”** (Philippians 2:1-3).

Nevertheless, there is no sin in having a disagreement. Not as long as it is a matter of personal opinion, and is respected. Remember what Paul said about such things: **“One man prefers one day above another, another man prefers every day. Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind”** (Romans 14:5). Nor is there a sin in dissenting against whatever is wrong. Indeed, we are commanded to oppose error, sin, and wickedness.

Factions sometimes result from dissensions. Factions refer to divisions producing different groups. And that is an evil among the disciples of Christ. Remember how the congregation at Corinth was divided into factions. Here is what Paul said to them about it: **“Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but ye may be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding.”**

**“For it was declared to me about you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 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?”** (First Corinthians 1:10-13). Denominationalism is an example of having factions among those who believe in Christ. The world approves of them, but Paul condemned such things.

Envy differs from jealousy. Envy is wanting what someone else has, not something like it but what he actually has. Therefore, envy is always wrong. Here is what Solomon said about envy: **“A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh, but envy is the rottenness of the bones”** (Proverbs 14:30). Envy can eat away the character of a man. And that can cause him to commit great sin.

Indeed, James said that fightings and wars were caused by envy: **“From where are wars and fightings among you? Is it not from here: from your pleasures warring in your body-parts? Ye desire and do not have, so ye murder. And ye envy and cannot obtain, so ye fight and make war. Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:1-3).

Murders have always been condemned by every country everywhere. However, disciples of the devil have succeeded in confusing people about what murder is. Hence, there are many murders now that are called something else, and therefore are excused in varying degrees. Consequently, murders have multiplied and human life has become much cheaper.

People intoxicate their bodies so they will feel good. Drunkenness is the most common example, although there are many kinds of drugs that people use to intoxicate themselves. Only fools do it. They are fools for intoxicating themselves, and after they become intoxicated they become even greater fools.

Paul warned about becoming intoxicated: **“And do not become intoxicated with wine, during which is debauchery, but be filled in the Spirit ...”** (Ephesians 5:18). Intoxication produces debauchery. It produces debauchery because it numbs the intellect and weakens the conscience.

Drunkenness has been the cause of immeasurable sorrow and grief, destruction and death. That is why America passed the law of Prohibition. It did not work because too many peo-

ple revolted against it. Nevertheless, Prohibition is still the law of the land in many parts of the country, including the county in which I now live. Such counties are called dry counties.

There are two main ways to cure for intoxications. The best way is to convert the hearts of the people. If they refuse, then the application of strict justice for what they do wrong during their intoxications will discourage most of them. Neither of those methods are being used in modern America. They are not being done because our authorities are themselves sinners who love to indulge themselves. Hence, intoxications are widespread, and the sorrows and destructions continue.

Revelings refer to boisterous merrymaking. Revelings are most commonly done during times of drunkenness. But whether during drunkenness or not, revelings also commonly cause debauchery. For the experience of reveling has an intoxicating effect on the mind of the reveler. Revelings never produce anything that is good and right and just. All revelings do is generate excitement, which gives sensual pleasure.

The last thing Paul said in his list was, **“and things like these.”** That means his list was not complete. Indeed, a complete list of the evil works of the flesh would be impossible to make. For sinful people are continually using their god-given talents to invent new ways to perform evil works of the flesh.

Paul concluded his list of the works of the flesh with a warning about them. He also reminded them that he had forewarned them about those things. Nobody who practices such things will inherit the kingdom of God in heaven. That kingdom will be in the new Jerusalem there. And only those who believe in Christ and live righteously will ever be there. Only they will inherit it.

## The fruit of the Spirit

- **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).

Paul gave seventeen examples of the works of the flesh, He now gives nine examples of the fruits of the Spirit. Those are also mere examples. Nevertheless, there are more ways to do evil than to do good. Also it is much easier to do evil than to do good. As Solomon said, **“... one sinner destroys much good”** (Ecclesiastes 9:18). Below are the fruits of the Spirit of God that Paul listed:

love  
joy  
peace  
longsuffering  
kindness  
goodness  
faithfulness  
meekness  
self-control

Love is the greater virtue, as Paul said, **“And now remain faith, hope, love, these three, but the greater of these is love”** (First Corinthians 13:13). And remember what Jesus said in answer to the question of the great commandment of 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. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”** (Matthew 22:37-40).

Paul also said, **“Owe no man anything except to love each other, for he who loves the other has fulfilled 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 13:8-10).

Love is both an attitude of the heart toward others, and a way of behaving toward them. It is the greater virtue because it is the foundation of all other virtues. Indeed, the Bible says, **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16).

Joy is a feeling about something that all is well. It is more than a feeling of common pleasure, because a man can be joyful even when he is suffering. For example, we can and should be joyful toward the hope that God has given us even when we are suffering. For Paul said, **“I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and make complete in my flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church”** (Colossians 1:24).

Therefore, Paul commanded us to be joyful: **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”** (Philippians 4:4). Notice he said we should rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord God is our cause for rejoicing because of the hope he has given us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Peace is the absence of strife and conflict. Genuine peace can only come through obedience to God. For only he knows how to harmonize all things together. Therefore, sin is the great enemy of peace, and there can be no genuine peace when sin is tolerated. That is why Jesus said, **“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).

That was one of the great missions of Christ. 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).

God is a God of peace. Therefore, he must eliminate sin by destroying Satan and his followers. As Paul said near the end of his letter to the Romans, **“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. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you”** (Romans 16:19-20).

Longsuffering is another great virtue, being a fruit of the Spirit of God. God is longsuffering because he wants to save our souls. For Paul said, **“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).

Therefore, we are commanded to be longsuffering toward each other: **“Put on therefore, as chosen men of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing each other, and forgiving yourselves, if any man has a complaint against any, just as also the Christ forgave you, so also ye, and above all these things, love, which is the bond of perfection”** (Colossians 3:12-14).

We are also commanded to be longsuffering toward our sufferings, which we experience as we strive to live righteously in this sinful world. As the book of Hebrews says, **“And we earnestly desire each of you to show the same diligence toward the full assurance of the hope until the end, so that ye may not become lazy, but imitators of those who, through faith and longsuffering, inherit the promises”** (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Kindness is another fruit of the Spirit. The word kindness occurs two hundred and fourteen times in the Bible. One hundred and sixty four of those times the word is combined with the word *loving* to say loving kindness, almost all of which refer to God. He is kind beyond measure toward us, and it is loving kindness. We owe our very existence to his kindness. And every blessing we enjoy is a result of his loving kindness, although few people appreciate it.

The Psalms are filled with expressions of God’s loving kindness. Psalm 107 begins by saying, **“O give thanks to Jehovah, For he is good, for his loving kindness is forever”** (Psalm 107:1). And four times in that psalm it says, **“O that men would praise Jehovah for his loving kindness, and for his wonderful works to the sons of men!”** (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31). Therefore, as children of God we too must show kindness, for it is one of the fruits of the Spirit of God.

Goodness is a general term that can refer to righteousness, or it can refer to good things such as blessings. And it is another one of the fruits of the Spirit of God. Therefore, when we have his Spirit within us, we should bear the fruit of goodness by living right and producing good things.

Faithfulness refers to steadfast adherence. As one of the fruits of the Spirit, faithfulness means adhering steadfastly to God and his righteousness. Faithfulness is trustworthy; it does not vacillate or fail under stress. Faithfulness is one of the signs of a genuine disciple of Christ.

When Jesus gave his parable about the seed and the four kinds of ground, one kind was completely unworthy, two kinds were unfaithful, and one was faithful and fruitful (see Matthew 13). One of the unfaithful kind was when tribulation or persecution caused failure. The other unfaithful kind was when the care of this age, and the deceitfulness of wealth caused spiritual failure.

Meekness is another of the fruits of the Spirit. Meekness is having patience and being gentle and kind. Do not confuse it with cowardice. God condemns cowards (see Revelation

21:8). Meekness is a balance between aggressiveness and cowardice. A man can be meek, yet very courageous. The Bible says that Moses was a meek man: **“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth”** (Numbers 12:3). Yet he was very strong, challenging Pharaoh many times.

Also remember what Jesus said about the meek: **“Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). Indeed, Jesus said that he himself was meek: **“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 11:29-30).

Self-control is another important virtue, a fruit of the Spirit. Even sinners must develop self-control. Only fools fail to develop it. A price drunkards pay for their escape from pain is a loss of self-control. And that makes them very dangerous, especially when they operate machinery, like driving a car. Solomon spoke of the loss of self-control, when he said, **“He whose spirit is without restraint is a city that is broken down and without walls”** (Proverbs 25:28). And so it is with drunkards.

Paul spoke about the value of self-control, when he said, **“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”** (First Corinthians 9:25).

That list Paul gave of those fruits of the Spirit of God is, of course, only a sample of the fruits of the Spirit. Peter also gave a list of them, when he said, **“Now this same thing also, having applied all eagerness, furnish in your faith, virtue, and in virtue, knowledge, and in knowledge, self-control, and in self-control, perseverance, and in perseverance, piety, and in piety, brotherly affection, and in brotherly affection, love. For these things existing in you and abounding, it leads to not being idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Second Peter 1:5-8).

Paul concluded his list by saying, **“Against such things there is no law.”** Even sinners appreciate the value of those fruits of the Spirit. However, they are often hypocrites who themselves violate them, but then attempt to conceal it so as to escape exposure and just retribution.

Remember what Jesus said to the scholars and Pharisees: **“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).

## We have crucified the flesh

- **And those of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and the lusts. If we live in the Spirit, we should also march in the Spirit** (Galatians 5:24-25).

After contrasting the works of the flesh with the works of the Spirit, Paul now seems to summarize how we in Christ are to live. We have figuratively crucified our flesh. We have

put to death within us the evil passions and lusts of our flesh. That means we no longer walk in the flesh, producing its evil works. Instead, we now live in the Spirit. And that means marching in the Spirit, producing its good works.

We who belong to Christ should have the reputation of producing the good works of righteousness of whatever kind they may be. That is how we march in the Spirit. And that is how we are going to be judged by the Lord.

Remember what John said in his vision of heaven: **“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. 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 20:11-13).

We will all be judged according to our works, whether we produced the evil works of the flesh or the good works of the Spirit in our lives.

## Be not conceited

- **Let us not become conceited, provoking each other, envying each other** (Galatians 5:26).

Paul now warns about pride. As we are born with our lusts of the flesh, so also we are apparently born with a sense of pride in ourselves, for the apostle John said, **“Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”** (First John 2:16). And as we must learn to subdue our lusts of the flesh, so also we must learn to subdue our pride of life.

For unrestrained pride is an evil; it makes a man arrogant and conceited. It makes him think he is better than other men, which makes him look down upon others, demeaning them relative to himself. And that naturally provokes others, because they know it is not right, and they resent it and oppose it whenever it is exposed.

Conceit also produces envy. Conceit blinds a man causing him to think he deserves the good things that others have. And that envy causes a man to excuse himself doing unjust things. For Solomon said, **“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Jehovah weighs the hearts”** (Proverbs 21:2).

## If a man is overtaken in some transgression

- **And brothers, if a man is overtaken in some transgression, ye the spiritual, restore such in a spirit of meekness, looking to thyself lest thou also be tempted** (Galatians 6:1).

Notice how Paul said a man may be overtaken in transgression. Being overtaken suggests the transgression takes control unexpectedly. Which reminds me of the great sin of David (see Second Samuel 11-12). He was one of the most righteous men of the Bible. Yet he

was overtaken in a transgression. It happened at a time when he was secure as the king of Israel. He succumbed to his lust for the wife of Uriah, a faithful soldier in his army. He committed adultery with her. And that caused events that led to his murder of Uriah.

There is no doubt that David never expected to commit adultery and murder. Yet in a weak moment of temptation he was overtaken in adultery, and then murder in an attempt to conceal it. God used the prophet Nathan to expose David's sins. David repented and was restored again to a man of righteousness. Nevertheless, his guilt about his great sin weighed him down for the rest of his life. His broken spirit never recovered. Moreover, God cursed him to suffer severely by members of his own family. You can read more of my comments about his sin in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

One great lesson from that sad story is that we need always be on guard lest we be overtaken in some transgression. Moreover, we, the spiritual, need to restore whoever has been overcome in a spirit of meekness, never assuming we could not be overtaken. As Paul also said to the Corinthians, **"Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall"** (First Corinthians 10:12).

Only we, the spiritual, can truly restore such a man. Sinners cannot restore men who sin. Just look at how sinners have corrupted the world. For example, our sinful judges are just making sinners worse sinners. They give the guilty little or no punishment, or they have them put in prisons where they learn how to become habitual criminals and teach other men to become career sinners.

## Bear the burdens of each other

- **Bear the burdens of each other, and so fulfill the law of the Christ** (Galatians 6:2).

Restoring those who are overtaken in transgressions is one way we bear each other's burdens. One example of restoring someone overtaken in a transgression was the man at Corinth who had his father's wife. Paul rebuked that congregation in his first letter to them because they tolerated his transgression. However, in his second letter he praised them for restoring the man to repentance.

Of course, there are many ways we can bear each other's burdens. Bearing each other's burdens fulfills the law of Christ. Jesus gave that law to his apostles during the last supper, when he said to them, **"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). For Jesus bore the burdens of all mankind by living in this world so he could qualify to redeem us (all who will believe and obey him) from the condemnation caused by our sins.

## Let each man examine his own work

- **For if some man presumes to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each man examine his own work, and then he will have the boast in himself alone and not in the other man** (Galatians 6:3-4).

One of the great values of being humble is that you will never presume to be something when you are nothing. Actually, we are all so specialized in our lives, that in most things we are truly nothing. Are not most of us nothing when it comes to the practice of medicine, or flying an airliner, or repairing an electric power station, or creating computer programs, to name just a few examples?

Moreover, many of us are inferior to others even in our specialty. As Paul said about us, **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent”** (First Corinthians 1:26). Therefore, we should not be arrogant and deceive ourselves into thinking we are more than we are.

Instead, each of us should examine our own work, because we are known by our fruits. Then we can boast in ourselves if our works merit praise. As Solomon said, **“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth, a stranger, and not thine own lips”** (Proverbs 27:2). If our fruits merit praise, then we can have some pride in ourselves.

When Paul said **“he will have the boast in himself alone and not in the other man”** he no doubt meant we should live such that we too can have something to be proud about, and not be so unproductive that we can only boast in the achievements of other men; we would not be obligated to praise other men only. Therefore, strive to bear much fruit for righteousness regardless of how humble and lowly our work may be. Remember the poor widow who gave so little yet so much (see Mark 12:42-43).

## Each man will bear his own burden

- **For each man will bear his own burden** (Galatians 6:5).

Paul had just said, **“Bear the burdens of each other, and so fulfill the law of the Christ.”** And now he is saying that each man will bear his own burden. What he means is that we should all bear our own burdens whenever we are able. However, when one of us is unable to bear his burden, then we should help bear it for him.

That primarily refers to the basic burdens of our needs. It does not refer to burdens a man may have that are about non-essentials, such as managing his money wisely, managing his household wisely, and managing his time and other resources wisely.

If a man is burdened with things like the inability to feed and house himself and his family because of some unavoidable tragedy, then we should help him bear those burdens. However, we should never support living slothfully, foolishly, or wantonly.

For example, Paul said, **“For even when we were with you we commanded you this, that if any man will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some who walk among you disorderly, not working at all, but being busybodies. Now to such men we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that, working with quietness, they should eat their own bread”** (Second Thessalonians 3:10-12).

## Share with him who teaches the word

- **But let him who is taught in the word share in all good things with him who teaches** (Galatians 6:6).

What Paul is saying here is that those who teach the good news of Christ should be paid just as well as those who are taught by them. Not giving just recompense for the labor of teaching about Christ and his good news of salvation is saying that information is not worth much. And that not only discourages those who would devote their lives to teaching Christ, but it also casts reproach on that teaching.

Paul even mentions recompense for elders in the churches who labor for Christ: **“Let the elders who rule well be regarded worthy of double compensation, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. For the scripture says, Thou shall not muzzle an ox that is threshing, and, The workman is worthy of his wage”** (First Timothy 5:17-18).

There have been some well-meaning preachers who deliberately kept themselves in poverty based upon such scriptures as the rich young ruler who was told by Jesus to sell all he had and give to the poor (See Matthew 19:21). That example was never intended to apply to every man who would follow Christ. It was given to that young man because Jesus knew his wealth was a stumbling block to him.

### Whatever a man sows this he will also reap

- **Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap. Because he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life** (Galatians 6:7-8).

This world is subject to God’s laws of nature. And no man can mock God by violating them. The consequences of whatever we do will always conform to the laws of nature. For those laws cannot be violated except by the miraculous power of God himself, either directly or through his prophets.

Such miracles happened in the past, but no longer. The last miracles occurred to prove that the good news of Christ was from God. However, now that we have the testimony of the Bible, such miracles are no longer needed. The Bible record itself is sufficient testimony to verify the authenticity of Christ and his good news of our salvation.

It is a common law of nature that we are all going to die and our bodies will decay. Countless men have sought desperately to avoid that law of nature, but they all fail. However, our divine spirit is not bound by that law. It does not die and decay because we are offspring of the eternal Spirit of God. Our divine spirit is bound by spiritual laws.

Consequently, if a man lives only for the things of this life, sowing to his flesh, he is going to reap the corruption of his flesh. Moreover, his spirit will suffer the second death of existence in the lake of fire called hell. In contrast, the man who lives to the Spirit of God, by believing and obeying Jesus Christ, will from that Spirit reap eternal life with God in heaven.

Therefore, be not misled. If you live only for things of this life, you are going to reap corruption with them. If you live for the things of the Spirit of God, you are going to reap eternal life with him. And God has given every man that choice.

## Be not weary doing good

- **And let us not be weary doing good, for in our own time we will reap, not desponding** (Galatians 6:9).

There are two meanings to the use of the word weary. One meaning refers to the normal feeling of the flesh after exerting much labor. That kind of weariness is an inescapable part of activity. The other meaning refers to an attitude of the heart, a loss of interest and appeal about something. That is what Paul means by not being weary doing well. We should not lose our interest in doing good. Living righteously should never lose its appeal to us. Always strive to maintain that appeal.

We should always keep our zeal for doing good. The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote about that, when he said, **“For yet a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay. But the righteous man will live from faith, and if he should withdraw, my soul is not pleased with him. But we are not of retreat for destruction, but of faith for the preservation of the soul”** (Hebrews 10:38-39).

And for our encouragement, James said, **“Take an example, my brothers, of evil-suffering and longsuffering, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we regard those who endured, blessed. Ye have heard of the fortitude of Job, and have seen the outcome of the Lord, that he is very compassionate and merciful”** (James 5:10-11).

## Work what is good toward all men

- **So then as we have time, let us work what is good toward all men, and especially toward those belonging to a household of the faith** (Galatians 6:10).

Time is an essential resource for us, and we should seek to use it wisely. As sons of God we should use the time we have available for labor to work productively and righteously. We should also strive to work what is good toward all men. That means we should also strive to be helpful toward all men, as we have the opportunity and see the need for it.

We should do good especially toward those who belong to a household of faith, which no doubt means a congregation of the Lord. Paul mentioned the household of God when he spoke to the Gentile Christians at Ephesus: **“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).

## Writing with large letters

- **See in how large letters I wrote to you with my hand** (Galatians 6:11).

That is more evidence to suggest Paul had poor vision at that time. Why would he write in large letters to them if he could see well? Remember also how he praised them for their willingness to sacrifice their eyes for him: **“... that if possible, having plucked your eyes out, ye would have given them to me”** (Galatians 4:15).

## Compelling you to be circumcised

- **As many as desire to make a good impression in flesh, these compel you to be circumcised, only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of the Christ** (Galatians 6:12).

There are those who want to make a good impression in flesh, and there are those who want to make a good impression toward God. Circumcision of the flesh accomplishes nothing except to make a good impression toward the Jews. Ritual circumcision of Gentiles makes them proselytes of the Jews. And he who becomes circumcised makes a good impression toward them.

Compelling Gentiles to become proselytes of the Jews also causes the Jews to stop persecuting them. Remember, during the time of the apostles the Jews were the major source of persecution against the church of Christ. And when a man became a proselyte of the Jews he was no longer a Christian.

For Paul said to them, **“Behold, I Paul say to you, that if ye are circumcised, Christ will benefit you nothing. 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 5:2-4).

Of course, circumcision for health and medical reasons is an entirely different matter.

## Even they do not keep the law

- **For not even those who have been circumcised themselves keep law, but they want you to be circumcised, so that they may boast in thy flesh** (Galatians 6:13).

The Israelites never kept the law fully. For Jesus said to the Jews, **“Did not Moses give you the law, and none of you does the law?”** (John 7:19). And Stephen 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 Jews wanted to circumcise the Gentiles so they could boast about it. It was not the law they were promoting. They wanted to boast of having circumcised a Gentile like a hunter boasts of his trophy. For Jesus also said to them, **“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).

## Boast only in the cross of Christ

- **But may it not be from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the**

**world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation** (Galatians 6:14-15).

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ symbolizes sacrificing our lives in this world in obedience to the will of God. Remember what 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).

Paul had much to boast about his worldly achievements, but he would only boast about sacrificing them all for the cause of Christ. As he said to the brothers at Philippi, **“Although (I having confidence also in flesh) if any other man seems to be confident in the flesh, I more: in circumcision the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; regarding law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness in law, having become blameless.**

**“But whatever was gain to me, these things I regarded loss because of the Christ. But indeed therefore I even consider all things to be loss because of things surpassing, of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I suffered the loss of all things, and consider them to be rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having my righteousness, that from law, but that through Christ’s faith—the righteousness from God based on faith—to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the participation of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if somehow I might attain to the resurrection of the dead”** (Philippians 3:4-11).

Paul became a new creation when he put on Christ. He became a new man with a new spirit from God. His life was changed from being an enemy of Christ to being a faithful apostle for him. And we too become a new creation when we put on Christ.

## Marching by that standard

- **And as many as will march by this standard, peace upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God** (Galatians 6:16).

The standard Paul refers to is having the world crucified to us, and us to the world. And Paul blessed all who march by that standard. Marching is orderly progression. That means we should live orderly in the sight of God, and make progress as we live. We should grow in the Spirit of God and bear much fruit for righteousness.

Paul called for peace and mercy to all who march by that standard. He also included the Israel of God, which are those who have the faith of Abraham. Namely, all who believe in Jesus Christ. As Paul said to the Romans, **“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).

We who have the faith of Abraham are the children of promise, which means we are the true Israel of God.

## Paul bore the marks of the Lord Christ

- **Finally, let no man cause troubles for me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus** (Galatians 6:17).

Most people believe the marks Paul bore in his body were either scars from his many persecutions, or they were marks made to identify bondmen. I do not agree with either of those ideas. The marks of the Lord Jesus were caused by the nails of his cross. Remember what Thomas said when the other apostles told him they had seen the resurrected Christ: **“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).

The marks of the Lord Jesus were the marks of the nails in his hands. And Paul said he bore those marks in his own body. That indicates Paul had actually been nailed to a cross in preparation to be crucified, but he somehow escaped. The Bible record does not tell of such an event, but Paul did tell the brothers at Corinth about a time when he had the sentence of death in himself (and those with him).

He said to them, **“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). And that could refer to almost being crucified.

## The grace of Christ was with their spirit

- **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit, brothers. Truly** (Galatians 6:18).

In his letters Paul often told of the grace of Christ for us. It is something we need to always remember, especially in times of sorrow and hardship. Our Lord is with our spirit because that is our eternal identity. That is what the Lord will take of us into heaven and give us a new incorruptible body for it.

# A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

## Paul's greeting

- **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, to the sanctified who are at Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-2).**

As he often did in his salutations Paul told how he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was very proud of having been chosen for that great work. And his love of Jesus was very deep. He also told how it was by the will of God that he had been chosen.

He began every one of his thirteen books of the Bible by calling for grace and peace from God and Christ be with them. Peter also expressed those words in his two books in the Bible. John expressed them in two of the five books of the Bible that he wrote. We should all pray for grace and peace from God and Christ.

## Blessed is God, who has blessed us

- **Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).**

Being blessed means enjoying good. There are many passages in the Bible saying that God is blessed. And there are many passages about different people saying they are blessed. The first thing Jesus said in his sermon on the mount was to describe various kinds of people who are blessed, such as the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart (see Matthew 5:3-12). Remember, that list of blessings is called the Beatitudes.

Paul told how God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is through Christ, the Son of God, that God is also our God and Father.

And Paul told how God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly things. We are certainly not blessed with every material blessing in the earthly things. That fact is obvious to every man. Indeed, the flesh of every man is suffering from a curse, the curse of Adam, the curse causing our flesh to suffer and eventually die and decay—from dust to dust.

Our great blessings are spiritual in the heavenly things, which are eternal in the heavens. And those great blessings are all in Christ Jesus. For it is only through him that we can enjoy those blessings. Remember what Peter said to the rulers, elders, and scholars who had arrested him: **“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).

## God chose us before the world began

- **Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and unblemished before him in love. Who predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the desire of his will, for appreciation of the glory of his grace, by which he blessed us in him who is beloved** (Ephesians 1:4-6).

God carefully planned before the foundation of the world what he was going to create and how it would be. And the most important part of that plan was how he was going to have sons to live for eternity with him. He would have many offspring. And being offspring of God meant we would have free will. Therefore, we would have the power to choose good or evil. His plan was that only those who lived in this world and proved themselves worthy by choosing good and rejecting evil would become his sons for eternity.

God planned how the world would operate, and how we would be bound with its fixed laws of nature. However, having free will, we would not be bound by the moral laws of the spirit. Therefore, each of his offspring would have the potential to live many different kinds of lives. And since his offspring would be given dominion over the world and the things in it, the functioning of the world would not be fixed. How it operated would not be predestined or predetermined.

God did predestine the *kind* of lives that would make us become worthy to be his sons for eternity. And those kinds of lives would be the ones that choose good and reject evil. Those kinds of lives would make us holy and unblemished before him in love.

For example, if I continue to choose to promote the good and oppose the evil then God has promised to make me one of his sons for eternity in heaven. However, if I change and decide to choose the evil and reject the good, then God has warned I will suffer eternal punishment when this life is over. The choice is mine to make. And so it is with every man and every woman while we are still living in the world. I speak much more about those things in my books *King Solomon's Advice for the World* and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

God predestined all who choose to promote the good and oppose the evil to become sons for himself through Jesus Christ. It was the desire of God's will to make us his sons. And he has given that wonderful gift to us for the appreciation of the glory of his grace. And his grace is truly glorious. For what could be a greater gift from him than to become a son of God for eternity with him in heaven?

And that ultimate blessing is in our Lord Jesus Christ, him who is beloved, beloved by God and by all who belong to him. And we belong to him by choosing to believe and obey him. For God predestined eternal sonship for all who make that choice, even before the foundation of the world. Therefore, if you conform yourself to that predestined kind of life, then you will inherit the sonship. That is God's promise to every man, because he is impartial.

## We have redemption in our Lord Christ

- **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 ultimate sacrifice of Christ (shedding his blood on the cross) culminated his life of perfect obedience to God the Father. And that earned him the right from the Father to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. And we all need his redemption, because Paul said to the Roman brothers, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ...”** (Romans 3:23).

Paul went on to explain to the Romans more about our redemption, saying that we were **“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 3:24-26).

And that wonderful redemption is according to the wealth of his grace—the immeasurable richness of his gift of redemption and sonship for us. The wealth of his grace has truly abounded for us. And it has abounded in all wisdom and intelligence. For God’s great plan for our redemption and sonship was an exceedingly brilliant plan, designed to both bless those who love him and condemn those who hate him, and do it all without partiality, with perfect justice. Paul speaks more about that next.

## The mystery of his will which he purposed

- **Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his desire, which he purposed within himself for an administration of the fullness of the times. To gather together all things in the Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, in him in whom also we obtained an inheritance** (Ephesians 1:9-11).

God’s will for creating things was a great mystery. But he made known to us the mystery of his will through the testimony of his prophets, the record of which we now have in the Holy Bible. For it was his desire to make that mystery known to us, to those who love and trust him.

The mystery of his will was the great plan he purposed within himself before the world began. And that great plan was for an administration of the fullness of the times. Which means God’s great plan extends from the beginning to the end of times. It involves managing all things throughout history, so that all things would be gathered together in Christ. God planned ahead exactly what he would do in the world regardless of how the world progressed, for he predetermined whatever can happen and how he would respond. I explain more about that in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

God’s ultimate purpose was to gather all things in the Christ, his only begotten Son. God’s ultimate goal is to unite all things, both things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

And eventually unite them in his Son Jesus Christ. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews said when he was speaking of God and Christ, **“Thou [God] subordinated all things under his [Jesus’] 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 2:8).

God’s goal to gather together all things in the Christ is not yet fulfilled, because we do not yet see all things subordinated to him. They are not yet subordinated because God is still tolerating rebellion against him. But in the fullness of the times they will all be subordinated to him. We will be subordinate to him either willfully as his obedient sons in heaven, or forcibly as the sinners will be in hell.

It is in Christ, the Son of God, that we obtain the inheritance of sonship with God, eternal sonship with him in heaven. For that has always been his will and his desire and his purpose. That was his ultimate purpose for creating all things: namely, to share his life by having sons to live for eternity with him in heaven. And this world was created as a place where we can prove ourselves worthy of that eternal sonship, that immeasurably great and wonderful gift of his grace.

### Predestined according to his purpose

- **Having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the deliberation of his will, for us to be for appreciation of his glory, men who have first hoped in the Christ** (Ephesians 1:11-12).

God so planned and created the world that there are many potential paths each of us can walk in this life, each one unique for us. There are the paths of sin and wickedness, and there are the paths of righteousness. Which path we walk is determined by many factors. However, whether we walk a path of sin and wickedness, or a path of righteousness is determined by our own free will. And Paul assures us that every man who walks a path of God’s righteousness has been predestined by God to have hope in Christ. And we all have that choice, because God is impartial. That has been God’s purpose from the beginning.

Notice how Paul also said that God **“works all things according to the deliberation of his will ... .”** It is God who works all things, because all things are energized by his Spirit. And although he allows sin and wickedness to happen, nothing can happen without him allow it. For example, Satan needed God’s permission before he could torment the righteous man Job (see Job 1).

God works all things according to the deliberation of his will, and it is God’s will, his desire, that we become his sons for eternity. Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose. 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. 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 8:28-30).

He also wants us to be for appreciation of his glory. He want us, his children, to be such that all creatures, both in heaven and on the earth, will have good reason to appreciate the

magnificent glory of God. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples, **“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 5:14-16).

Sinners may resist appreciating his glory. But seeing our faith and righteousness in Christ and the hope we have in him, they will have no good reason not to appreciate his glory.

## Sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise

- **In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the good news of your salvation, in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is a pledge of our inheritance, for the redemption of the acquired possession, for appreciation of his glory** (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Paul said the word of truth was the good news of our salvation. And that salvation is indeed good news; it is fabulous news; it is the very best news we could ever hear. And that good news is the word of truth that was proclaimed directly by Christ himself and then through his apostles. The teachings of which have been recorded in the New Testament of the Bible for us to believe in God and the good news of Christ.

And having believed that good news we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. That means the Holy Spirit now resides in us as a guarantee of our salvation. For the Holy Spirit of God is only in those who believe and obey Jesus Christ.

As Jesus said to his apostles, **“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). And those words are for us also.

And as Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost when they asked him what to do, **“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 Holy Spirit dwelling in us is a wonderful gift and a pledge of our inheritance to become sons of God for eternity. The Holy Spirit is a seal of God’s promise that we will be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins, and will be adopted by him as his children.

Our redemption also means we are an acquired possession. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“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).

We were bought with the blood of Christ. For Peter said, **“Knowing that ye were redeemed from your vain behavior inherited from fathers, not with perishable silver**

**or gold, but by precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and unspotted—of Christ”** (First Peter 1:18-19).

And our redemption is for appreciation of God’s glory. That marvelous gift of our redemption and salvation is so that we will all appreciate the magnificent glory of God. Which glory is manifested in many ways, especially in his gift of our eternal salvation and sonship with him in heaven.

That passage in Ephesians is the third time Paul mentioned the appreciation of the glory of God. That expression is only mentioned here in his letter to the Ephesian brothers. But he states it three times, which is no doubt to emphasize its significance and importance. The glory of God needs to be appreciated by every creature, because he created us all. And we need to appreciate his glory most of all because he is giving us the opportunity to become his sons for eternity with him in heaven. Failing to appreciate his glory is a great injustice.

### Paul ceased not expressing thanks for them

- **Because of this I also, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love for all the sanctified, I cease not expressing thanks for you, making remembrance of you in my prayers** (Ephesians 1:15-16).

What Paul probably meant by saying “because of this,” was that God chose us in Christ for eternal sonship with him, although he may also have meant all of those wonderful things about God and Christ, and the hope we have in them that he spoke about.

But whatever Paul meant, he said he never ceased expressing thanks for them (the disciples at Ephesus), and remembering them in his prayers. Prayer is a very important part of our lives. The record tells how Jesus prayed, both in private and in the presence of his disciples. And we have other examples of prayers in the Bible. For example, the book of Psalms contains many prayers to God.

Paul expressed thanks for them, and made remembrance of them in his prayers because he had heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus. Knowledge of the faith of others is encouraging to us. Therefore, we too should express thanks for all we know who have faith in the Lord Jesus, and make remembrance of them in our prayers.

The prophet Elijah became very discouraged when he thought he was the only man of faith who was left in Israel. He fled into the wilderness to escape from the evil queen Jezebel because she sought his life. And when Jehovah asked him why he was there, Elijah replied, **“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”** (First Kings 19:10).

After demonstrating some things to Elijah, and giving him some commands, Jehovah encouraged him by saying, **“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 19:18).

Remember however, our lives should be more than just prayer. When Paul said he ceased not expressing thanks for them, and making remembrance of them in his prayers, he was

certainly not being literal. His life was much more than prayer. It is not good to isolate yourself and spend your time only in prayer.

## Having the eyes of our hearts enlightened

- **So that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened** (Ephesians 1:17-18).

Paul ceased not expressing thanks for them, making remembrance of them in his prayers. He said it was that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of him, which would enlighten the eyes of their hearts.

Paul prayed for their wisdom, but not for the wisdom of the world. He wanted them to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of God. A spirit of wisdom is having dynamic understanding, understanding that would both empower them and energize them to live wisely and righteously.

Paul also wanted them to have a spirit of revelation in knowledge of God. Our knowledge of God comes almost entirely through revelation; not a personal revelation, but the revelation that has been recorded in the words of the Holy Bible. For it was the Holy Spirit of God that inspired God's prophets to write that greatest of all books. The Spirit of God revealed to them things about God, namely the things we need to know about him and his will for us.

Paul wanted the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened. The eyes of our hearts enables us to see things that the eyes of our face cannot see. The eyes of our face only see the superficial things, but not the deeper and richer things of our existence. That is why children perceive so poorly, even though their eyes are better than ours. They see but do not perceive, which is why they are so naïve. That is one reason why they are so limited in what they can do. The eyes of their hearts are not yet enlightened.

## The dominion of his might

- **For you to know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the sanctified, and what is the transcending greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of the dominion of his might, which he wrought in the Christ** (Ephesians 1:18-20).

Paul wants our hearts to be enlightened about God, for us to know (1) what is the hope of his calling, (2) what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the sanctified, and (3) what is the transcending greatness of his power toward us who believe. All of which are according to the working of the dominion of his might, which he wrought in the Christ.

The hope of God's calling is the promise to save our souls from the condemnation of our sins and give us eternal life with him in heaven as his sons there.

We who believe and obey the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are his sanctified. And the wealth of the glory of God's inheritance in us is that after this world ends he will make us his sons for eternity to reign with him in the new Jerusalem of the new heaven and earth.

The transcending greatness of his power toward us who believe is (1) that he is able to fulfill our hope of eternal life in heaven which will be without sorrow and pain, (2) he is able to keep his promise to make us his sons for eternity, (3) he is able to defeat all of his enemies and ours, and (4) he is able to create a new heaven and earth over which we will reign with him. The transcending greatness of God's power enables him to do all of those things and much more for us who believe.

God is able to do all of those things according to the working of the dominion of his might. The might of God has dominion over all things; whether in heaven or on the earth, whether they are things good or things evil, God has dominion over them. Evil exists in the world only because God is tolerating sin here. For he has the power to defeat all evil anytime he desires.

It seems paradoxical, but God is tolerating evil for now because he loves us. As Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“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). When we suffer because of evil, remember, God is also suffering with longsuffering. And it is because he loves us.

And God has wrought all of those wonderful things for us in the Christ. For it was Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God whom God sent into the world, who defeated God's enemies, redeemed our souls from condemnation, and gave us the power to become sons of God for eternity. It is in Christ that we have the hope of his calling, and can receive the wealth of the glory of his inheritance, and can enjoy the transcending greatness of his power.

## The supremacy of Christ

- **Having raised him from the dead and seated at his right hand in the heavenly things, far above every principle office, and position of authority, and power, and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is coming** (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Because Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God, even to the point of sacrificing himself on the cross, God (1) raised him from the dead, and (2) seated him at his right hand in the heavenly things. When God raised Jesus from the dead it was a permanent resurrection. Every other man who had been miraculously raised from the dead eventually died again. However, God raised Jesus from the dead never to die again.

Moreover, God seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly things. The throne of God is in the heavenly world, in the midst of the heavenly things there: the heavenly agents, the cherubim, the heavenly dwellings, and everything else there. And being seated at the right hand of God means Jesus reigns with him in his throne.

Those were things that God rewarded Jesus because of his obedience to him. And God has promised to reward us in a similar way for our obedience to him. God will raise us (our spirits) from the dead never to die again. And Jesus will seat us with him in the throne of God. For Jesus 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).

Having been seated at the right hand of God, Jesus was given authority far above

every principle office  
 every position of authority  
 every power  
 every lordship  
 every name that is named

Principle offices are those that have the highest rank of authority. They are the chief, the foremost, the dominant offices that have a right to rule supreme. Positions of authority include every rank of authority, every position with a right to rule.

When Paul said every power and every lordship he probably meant Jesus is not only far above every principle office and position of authority, but he is above everyone that rules anything. Indeed, he is far above everything that exists, which is what the words “every name that is named” means. For a name indicates the identity of something that exists. Even kinds of atoms are named and kinds of stars are named. For names are not limited to specific individual things.

Therefore, Jesus is far above everything that exists, not only in this age, the heaven and the earth that now exists, but also in the new heaven and earth, which is the age that is coming. And he was given those things because of his perfect obedience to God the Father (who created all things) even enduring the evil slander and cruel crucifixion imposed upon him by his enemies.

## God made Christ head of all things

- **And he subordinated all things under his feet, and appointed him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulfillment of him who fills all in all** (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Jesus is far above everything, with everything subordinated under his feet. God appointed Jesus head of all things for the church. The church is the body of Christ, and we are individual members of it. The church is his body in the sense that he is our head and we are members of his divine organization, which organization is called the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the heavens. Upon the earth it is called the church. And God appointed Jesus over all things for the church. It is to our benefit that Jesus was appointed over all things. It is to our benefit because we are his body and share with his glory, honor, and power, under his headship.

The church is also the fulfillment of God who fills all in all. There are two other places in the Bible that use the expression “all in all.” Both are found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. The first passage describes how the gifts of the Spirit are all from the working of God: **“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”** (First Corinthians 12:4-6).

The second passage is about how everything is going to be subordinated to God: **“And when all things are made subordinate to him [Jesus, the Son of God], 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 15:28).

The church, the body of Christ, is the fulfillment of God who fills all in all. The Spirit of God fills the heavens and the earth. I describe in detail how that occurs in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. The church is the fulfillment of God because the church is composed of his sons. And it has been his purpose from before the beginning to have sons to live with him in heaven for eternity. All things were created to fulfill that purpose. I explain much more about those things in the same book, *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Once dead in trespasses and sins

- **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).

We have all been given the sentence of death because we have all sinned. We all once walked according to the era of this world. The era of this world is one of rebellion against God. For this world is filled with devils and demons; it is filled with hostile elements and hostile creatures; it is filled with the souls of hostile men. All of which is why it is filled with sorrow and death.

The era of this world is one of rebellion against God because of the ruler of the power of the air; namely the evil spirit called Satan. Being called the ruler of the power of the air is no doubt figurative. Remember, a spirit is energy and power. And since Satan rules the spirits of sinful men and demons, he is the ruler of that power. And since air is an invisible material that covers the world, perhaps that passage symbolizes the invisible spirits (powers) of those evil men and demons that he rules throughout the world. Nevertheless, whatever it means, the rule of his spirit is limited. He cannot perform anything supernatural, and God will always have the power to override whatever the devil does.

Paul said that Satan was **“the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience.”** John also said, **“He who is doing sin is of the devil...”** (First John 3:8). What John meant by “doing sin” was living a sinful life. And he said by observing the way men live was how to determine who belonged to God and who belonged to the devil: **“By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother”** (First John 3:10).

Satan can only work in men who allow him. And they allow him when they choose to rebel against the will of God. When that happens they become “tuned in” to the spirit of the devil, which allows him to work in them, perverting their hearts and minds. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Children of wrath

- **Among whom we also all once behaved in the lusts of our flesh, doing the intentions of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath as also the others** (Ephesians 2:3).

We once walked according to the era of the world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. We walked that way because we behaved in the lusts of our flesh, doing the intentions of the flesh and of the thoughts. Remember how Paul said our flesh is against our spirit: **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that whatever ye may want, these things ye may not do”** (Galatians 5:17).

Paul then told about the consequences of behaving in the lusts of our flesh: **“Now the works of the flesh are apparent, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strifes, jealousies, wraths, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envyings, murders, intoxications, revelings, and things like these ...”** (Galatians 5:19-21).

What Paul meant by the *intentions* of the flesh and of the thoughts probably refers to our knowledge of evil. We are all born with intuitive knowledge of good and evil inherited from Adam. And as we live we acquire even more knowledge of good and evil. And as we mature most of what we do is a result of premeditation. For maturity demands inhibiting most reflexive and impulsive behavior.

But as long as men are motivated by the lusts of our flesh, they are going to premeditate ways to satisfy them. Hence, sinners do the intentions of the flesh and of the thoughts. The flesh intends to satisfy its lusts, and the thoughts premeditate ways to satisfy them.

Consequently, sinners produce evil and are by nature children of wrath. They are children of wrath by nature because they behave according to the natural lusts of their flesh, which lusts lead to evil behavior. Being children of wrath probably means they are both the cause and the target of God’s wrath. As Paul said, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness ...”** (Romans 1:18).

One way God’s wrath is revealed from heaven is by the plagues he sends against the world. The book of Revelation gives an example when it says, **“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).

## God has shown his great love for us

- **But God, being rich in mercy, through his great love that he loved us, even us being dead in the transgressions, he made alive together with the Christ (ye are saved by grace), and raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly things in Christ Jesus** (Ephesians 2:4-6).

God is truly rich in mercy, even though he made us to live in this world of sorrow and death. He is rich in mercy through his great love that he loved us. He loves us because we are his offspring, with the potential to become his sons for eternity with him in heaven. However, that potential can only be fulfilled by living righteously in this world of temptations, sorrows, and death.

God's love is so great for us that he created all things for us. For Paul said that all things are ours: **“Therefore let not one man boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's”** (First Corinthians 3:21-23).

God has expressed the richness of his mercy and his great love for us even though we were dead in our transgressions. Everyone who sins against him is condemned to die, regardless of who he is. The devil and his agents are condemned to die. Even though Adam was called a son of God (see Luke 3:38), yet he was condemned to die. And every man is condemned to die because every man has sinned, every man except Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

We were, therefore, dead in our transgressions, but God expressed the richness of his mercy and his great love for us by making us alive together with the Christ. God made us alive when we became a disciple of Christ, when we became a part of Christ. And that salvation was a gift of his grace.

Being made alive together with Christ, God raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly things in Christ Jesus. Although we have not yet been raised up or seated in the literal sense, that promise of God is so certain that it can be said to have already happened. Moreover, we have been raised up and seated in the heavenly things in a figurative sense by our eternal salvation through Christ, and by the powers we have from God through prayer.

## The wealth of his grace in kindness

- **So that in the coming ages he might show the transcending wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus** (Ephesians 2:7).

The coming ages refer to the new heaven and earth after this world is over. And at that time God will show the transcending wealth of his grace in kindness toward us, which grace is in Christ Jesus. The wealth of his grace is so great it transcends all things. For 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).

Indeed, it is so great that we cannot even imagine its wonders. For Paul also said, **“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. But God disclosed to us through his Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God”** (First Corinthians 2:9-10).

God disclosed the transcending wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. He has not disclosed any of the details of it because it would be impossible for us to understand them. Remember how Paul spoke about a man who saw wonders in paradise: **“And**

**I know such a man (whether in body, or whether outside the body, I know not, God knows) that he was caught up into the paradise, and heard inexpressible sayings that are not permitted for a man to utter”** (Second Corinthians 12:3-4).

Yet in the coming ages those wonders will be even greater, much too great for us to ever understand now. But remember, they will only be for those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ, and obey him. For the transcending wealth of God’s grace in kindness is only toward those who belong to Christ Jesus.

## Our salvation is a gift of God

- **For ye are saved by grace through faith, and this a gift of God, not from you, not from works, so that not any man may boast** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We are saved by God’s grace. And it is a gift of God, because it cannot be earned from our works. No man has the strength of his spirit or the moral character to resist every temptation and earn his way into heaven. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God was able. Therefore, no man can boast of having earned his way into heaven.

Thus, our salvation is by grace through our faith in Jesus Christ. That has been God’s plan from before the beginning of creation. Christ came into this world to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, so that his supremacy can never be challenged. And it is only through him that we can be redeemed from the condemnation caused by our sins. We can be redeemed by repenting of our sins, and following him as an obedient disciple.

## We are his workmanship

- **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God preordained that we should walk in them** (Ephesians 2:10).

We are God’s workmanship. And he created us so that we would need to be redeemed by Christ. For he created us to live in the world where we cannot live without sin. Remember how Paul told of that: **“For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all”** (Romans 11:32). God created us that way so that no man can boast or ever challenge the Son of God.

However, in Christ Jesus we can become a new creation. Remember how 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).

And as a new creation in Christ Jesus, we were created for good works. God preordained good works to be achieved, using the many resources he has provided for us. For after the Creation God commanded mankind to **“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 1:28).

God so made the world that there is the potential for many kinds of good works. And as his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, God preordained that we should walk in good works. He preordained how we can achieve good things, and he preordained

us as disciples of Christ to work to achieve them. I explain those things much more in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

## Once having no hope and godless

- **Remember therefore that once ye, the Gentiles in flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision (in flesh, made by hands), that ye were at that time independent of Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and unknown of the covenants of the promise, having no hope and godless in the world** (Ephesians 2:11-12).

God commanded Abraham and his male descendants to be circumcised. Hence, being circumcised was an indication of belonging to God and being separated from the Gentiles. Consequently, uncircumcision became associated with impurity, as indicated by this passage from Isaiah: **“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).

Therefore, the Gentiles

- were independent of Christ
- were alienated from the citizenship of Israel
- were unknown of the covenants of the promise
- had no hope and godless in the world

The Gentiles were independent of Christ because God did not send him to them. Therefore, Jesus never preached to Gentiles, and when he was here he commanded his disciples against preaching to them. For when he sent out his apostles to proclaim the kingdom, he said to them, **“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).

Hence, the Gentiles had been alienated from the citizenship of Israel and unknown of the covenants of the promise. They were alienated and unknown unless they were converted and became proselytes.

The law of Moses made provision for that when it gave commandments about the Passover feast: **“And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to Jehovah, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it, and he shall be as one who is born in the land, but no uncircumcised man shall eat of it. One law shall be to him who is home-born, and to the stranger who sojourns among you”** (Exodus 12:48-49).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of the Gentiles had no hope and were godless in the world. However, that does not mean they were completely condemned. For Paul said to the Athenians, **“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).

## But now in Christ Jesus

- **But now in Christ Jesus ye, being formerly far off, became near in the blood of the Christ** (Ephesians 2:13).

Although God did not send Jesus to the Gentiles, after his resurrection God did send Peter, with the keys that Jesus gave him, to open the gates of the kingdom to the Gentiles, offering them the good news of Christ (see Acts 10). And now we Gentiles can become part of God's chosen people, and have the same opportunity, through Christ, to become sons of God for eternity in heaven with him.

## Christ reconciled us

- **For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the dividing wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity—the law of the commandments in ordinances—so that he might create in himself the two into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity by it** (Ephesians 2:14-16).

From the very beginning God has had a special people for himself. Adam and his offspring were the first, being called sons of God. For the record says, **“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair. And they took to them wives of all that they chose”** (Genesis 6:1-2). I describe that contrast in more detail in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

After the great flood God chose Abraham and his descendants (the Hebrews) to be his special people, from which came the nation of Israel. It was through them that the law was given, the Bible was written, and Christ became our redeemer. But now God's chosen people are not just from one race or nation; they are disciples of Christ from every nation.

There have always been a few righteous souls in every nation, but they were divided and alienated from being a chosen people of God. They were also unknown of the covenants of the promise, the promise that through the seed of Abraham all the nations would be blessed. Therefore, they had no hope and were godless in the world. Now, however, God has united all the righteous souls from every nation. He has united them all in one body to God through the sacrifice of Christ.

Christ also abolished in his flesh the enmity, which was the law of the commandments in ordinances. Every man born into the world has been under law to God. Paul wrote about how the law is written in the hearts of men even if they have no formal law.

As he 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). And it is by that law every man would be judged in the last day.

However, we who are in Christ are no longer under law to God. We will not be judged by any law, because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, the enmity. As Paul said to the Gentiles in Galatia, **“For as many as are from works of law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is every man who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law, to do them. But that no man is made righteous by law before God, is evident, because, The righteous man will live from faith. And the law is not from faith, but the man who does them will live in them.**

**“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. So that the blessing of Abraham might occur for the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through the faith”** (Galatians 3:10-14).

Christ redeemed the Jews and the Gentiles from the curse of the law; he abolished the enmity when he sacrificed himself in obedience to God. And he made us both one. He broke down the dividing wall of partition between the Jews (the remnant of Israel) and the Gentiles. The sons of Israel in the flesh are no longer God’s chosen people, as distinct from the Gentiles. Now every disciple of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, is a child of God.

### We now belong to the household of God

- **And after coming he preached good news, peace to you, to those far off and to those near, because through him we both have the access in one Spirit to the Father. So then ye are no more alien and foreign, but fellow citizens of the sanctified, and belonging to the household of God** (Ephesians 2:17-19).

When Jesus began his ministry the record says he was **“preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people”** (Matthew 4:23). His primary work was to preach the good news, obedience to which establishes peace among us and with God. Jesus’ work of healing was to prove that his preaching was from God.

Paul said that Jesus preached good news to those far off and to those near. Those far off refer to the Gentiles. However, Jesus himself did not preach to them. That statement is similar to this one about immersion: **“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 4:1-3).

It is through Jesus that we both, Jews and Gentiles, now have access in one Spirit to the Father. He broke down the dividing wall of partition. Therefore, we Gentiles are no more alien and foreign. We are fellow citizens of the sanctified. The sanctified are those who have been purified and made holy before God.

We are sanctified by the blood of Christ. When the author of the book of Hebrews was comparing the sacrifice of Jesus with the animal sacrifices at the altar, he said, **“Therefore Jesus also, so that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate”** (Hebrews 13:12).

We Gentiles are not only fellow citizens of the sanctified, but we belong to the household of God. We are children of God. The apostle John spoke of that, when he said, **“Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God. Because of this the world does not know you, because it did not know him.**

**“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is. And every man who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as that man is pure”** (First John 3:1-3).

## A habitation of God

- **Which was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner, in whom the whole building joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together in Spirit into a habitation of God** (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Paul here uses figurative language to compare the kingdom of God with a building. He said the household of God was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief corner. They are the foundation of the household of God because of their teachings, which teachings have been recorded in the words of the New Testament. Therefore, we can say that the teachings in the New Testament are the foundation of the house of God.

The teachings of Christ compose the chief corner. And the four biographies of him which contain those teachings compose about half of the New Testament. And it is in him that the whole building joined together grows into a holy temple of the Lord. As faithful disciples of Christ we must (1) be joined together, and (2) grow into a holy temple in the Lord.

In his prayer during the time of last supper Jesus emphasized the importance of the unity of his church, unity both among the disciples and unity with God and Christ. He said, for example, **“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 must also grow into a holy temple in the Lord. Our growth involves increasing both our strength and our size. We grow in spiritual strength as we increase our faith in Christ and our knowledge of the word of God. We grow in size as more souls are added to the church. Those are the chief goals of our labors for the Lord.

The church with its many congregations is a holy temple in the Lord. The church is a living thing; it is not a collection of buildings. Remember this passage about that: **“And questioned by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God comes, he [Jesus] 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 church is composed of the souls of faithful disciples of Christ. Remember what 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 Paul also said that it is in Christ that we are built together in Spirit into a habitation of God. His Spirit dwells in us; he abides in us. We experience him living in us through our knowledge of him and through the feelings of our enlightened conscience.

## Administering the grace of God

- **For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, since indeed ye heard of the administration of the grace of God, which was given to me for you, that according to revelation he made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief** (Ephesians 3:1-3).

When Paul called himself the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles, that indicates he was in bondage because of his service to Christ for the work of offering salvation to the Gentiles.

He said the administration of the grace of God was given to him for them, the Gentiles. Paul's use of the word administration means to administer, to perform a service. And serving the grace of God was given to him for them. The service of the grace of God was presenting and offering them the good news of salvation. That service of administering God's grace was given to Paul for them.

And that grace was revealed to Paul according to revelation. It was not taught to him by any man. It was given to him by divine inspiration. And that revealing made known to him the mystery. Which mystery was that the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs and fellow partakers of God's promised blessing. It was a mystery because it was completely unexpected, although there were a few indications of it in the Old Testament record. Paul explains that mystery next.

## The mystery of Christ has now been revealed

- **With which reading ye can recognize my understanding in the mystery of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. For Gentiles to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and fellow partakers of his promise in the Christ through the good news** (Ephesians 3:4-6).

Paul said he had written before in brief, with which reading they could recognize his understanding in the mystery of the Christ. The mystery of the Christ was not made known to the sons of men in other generations. But Paul said, **"... it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets."** Paul also said that he understood that mys-

tery, which God had revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; he knew that mystery by divine inspiration.

That mystery was **“For Gentiles to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and fellow partakers of his promise in the Christ through the good news.”** That mystery was for Gentiles to be included as God’s chosen people. It was such a mystery that the Jews never even suspected it. Remember how contemptuous they were toward the Gentiles. However, Paul said the Gentiles

are now fellow heirs

are now of the same body

are now fellow partakers of God’s promise in the Christ

And that promise is through his good news of our salvation.

Paul told about our being heirs when he said to his brothers at Rome, **“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). And he said to them at Corinth, **“Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:27).

The promise of God was that through the seed of Abraham all the nations would be blessed. And the Gentiles (who believe in Christ) are now fellow partakers of that promise. Paul also spoke of that to the Christians at Rome, when he said, **“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”** (Romans 4:16-17).

## Paul became a helper

- **Of which I became a helper according to the gift of that grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power** (Ephesians 3:7).

Paul became a helper of the good news of Christ to the Gentiles. And he became a helper according to the gift of the grace of God. It was the kindness of God that made Paul a helper, even though he had been an enemy of Christ. And Paul said that grace, that kindness, was given to him according to the working of God’s power. God has the power to convert an enemy into a faithful helper—if the man has the right kind of spirit.

For remember, that power can only work with those whose spirit is of a righteous character. God can only change our hearts when we are open to him. Consider this example that God gave to the sons of Israel: **“The word which came to Jeremiah from Jehovah, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter’s house, and, behold, he was making a work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it another vessel again, as seemed good to the potter to make it.**

**“Then the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says Jehovah. Behold, as the clay in the potter’s hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel”** (Jeremiah 18:1-6).

God's power can only change hearts when those hearts are humble and malleable and not hardened and rebellious. God's power changed Paul from an enemy to a helper because Paul was humble and tender hearted. And when we face hearts that are hardened and rebellious toward Christ, Jesus told us to **"shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them"** (Luke 9:5).

## The mystery was hidden from the ages

- **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** (Ephesians 3:8-9).

Paul was so humble and penitent that he called himself **"less than the least of all the sanctified."** However, he did not let that depress him and impair his work as a helper of Christ. Indeed, he worked even more abundantly. For remember what 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). Therefore, let not failure defeat you, but let it motivate you to labor more abundantly.

God's grace was given to Paul **"to preach good news among the Gentiles."** That good news is the unsearchable wealth of Christ. The wealth of Christ is unsearchable because God has given him all things, just as he said to his apostles during the last supper: **"All things, as many as the Father has are mine"** (John 16:15). Moreover, God has given him the right to redeem us from condemnation and save our souls for eternity in heaven.

God's grace was also given to Paul **"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."** Remember, the word administration means to administer and perform a service. And the mystery hidden from the ages in God was that his Son, Jesus Christ, would come into the world, conquer sin and condemn sinners, and earn the right to save the souls of all who would believe and obey him.

It was a mystery because nobody thought it was possible to forgive our sins but not the sins of his enemies without being partial. For partiality is unjust, and God can never be unjust, because remember justice is the foundation of his throne (see Psalm 89:14). He can now forgive the sins of those who love him because Jesus earned the right to redeem all who believe and obey him. And he can condemn all unrepentant sinners because they refuse to believe and obey Christ.

It was also a great mystery because it was apparently inconceivable that the Son of God would leave his glory in heaven to be born in the world to live and suffer as a poor and rejected man, but always be obedient to God. It was apparently almost as inconceivable as to think that Satan would ever forsake his power, and allow himself to be born into the world and live and suffer as a poor and rejected man, but always be obedient to God.

Christ was so great in heaven that God created all things through him. Remember what the apostle John said about him when he referred to him as “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. In him was life, and the life was the light of men”** (John 1:1-4).

## Making known the manifold wisdom of God

- **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).

That mystery hidden from the ages in God revealed the manifold wisdom of God. He was able to perform what was considered impossible. It was Jesus’ sacrificial life of perfect obedience in the world that conquered sin and defeated Satan. For it was only after Jesus was crucified and ascended to the throne of God, that Satan was cast out of heaven.

John in his book of Revelation described that time, when he said, **“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).

Jesus was the Lamb, and his great sacrifice enabled him to establish his church, through which he redeems our souls and condemns all unrepentant sinners, including the devil and the demons. That was part of God’s plan from the beginning. It was his purpose from the ages to adopt all men in the world who love and obey him to be his sons for eternity, and to condemn unrepentant sinners. And doing it impartially with perfect justice revealed the manifold wisdom of God to the principal offices and the positions of authority in the heavenly things.

Few people realize how much the realm of heaven is greater than the realm of the world. And it contains a vast and highly developed civilization with its principle offices and positions of authority. Before Christ came into the world the heavenly realm had been troubled

by the challenges to God made by Satan and his supporters. Read the first part of the book of Job for a good example of how Satan challenged God in heaven.

The obedient life of Jesus in this world enabled God to defeat every argument of Satan, and justly cast him out of heaven (although it took a war to do it). And that revealed to the principle offices and positions of authority in heaven just how vast and all encompassing is the wisdom of God. For there is no problem he cannot solve, or challenge against him that he cannot defeat.

Therefore, it is in Christ Jesus our lord, and only in him that **“we have boldness and access in confidence through his faith.”** We can have assurance with God, knowing that our hope is in him. And we can have access to God, because he has adopted us to be his children. We can have our boldness and access in confidence. And that confidence is through the faith, the perfect faith, of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' faith in the Father was so great that he left his glory in heaven. And instead he lived in this world as a poor man preaching his good new of the kingdom of God and healing many people. And he remained obedient to God even though he suffered much persecution, even to the point of being put to death by crucifixion.

### Paul's tribulations were on their behalf

- **Therefore I ask that ye not become discouraged at my tribulations on your behalf, which is your glory** (Ephesians 3:13).

It is easy to feel guilty and discouraged when someone is being subject to tribulations for our sakes. That is especially true when we love that person. In a sense their tribulations becomes a tribulation to us. That was why Paul asked them not to become discouraged at his tribulations on their behalf.

And to help keep them from becoming discourage about it, he told them his tribulations on their behalf was their glory. The tribulations that Paul suffered on their behalf were a consequence of preaching the good news of Christ. Jesus suffered tribulations because of it, and he prophesied that his apostles would also suffer tribulations. For he said to 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”** (Matthew 24:9).

And the acceptance of the good news of Christ is the glory of every man. It is our glory because it makes us a child of God with the promise of becoming his sons for eternity. And what could be more glorious than being a son of God in heaven with him? But that is only if we remain faithful to the end.

### From whom every patriarchy is named

- **For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every patriarchy in heavens and on earth is named** (Ephesians 3:14-15).

What Paul meant by every patriarchy was every nationality. And from what he said, there are nationalities in heaven as well as on the earth. On earth most nationalities result from

genealogy. However, the citizens of heaven do not result from genealogy; they are not conceived and born as we are. How it happens is not known. There is much mystery about the heavenly world and its citizens.

Nevertheless, every patriarchy comes from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, a name gives an identity, and God is the creator of everything, including every identity.

Just as Paul said that he bowed his knees to the Father, so we too should bow our knees to the Father. We should bow joyfully and willfully. But whether willful or not, every knee will eventually bow to him, which means to submit to him. As Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **“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”** (Romans 14:10-11). Every knee will bow to Christ, as well as to God the Father.

We should all bow to the Father because he has given us the opportunity to become his sons for eternity. No greater opportunity could ever be given, and it is available to every man, but only while we live upon the earth. And we should all bow to Christ as well, because it is only because of him and through him that we have that great opportunity.

## Strengthened for the inner man

- **So that he would grant you, according to the wealth of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his Spirit for the inner man, for the Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith** (Ephesians 3:16-17).

Paul bowed his knees to the Father so that God would grant us to be strengthened with power for the inner man. The inner man is our eternal spirit. It is the identity we take with us in the afterlife. Paul contrasted the inner man of our spirit with the outer man of our flesh, when he said, **“Therefore we are not discouraged, but even if the outer man of us is perishing, yet the inner man is renewed day by day”** (Second Corinthians 4:16).

As disciples of Christ, our inner man is renewed day by day, and is strengthened with power through God’s Spirit. We sense the power of our inner man from our conviction of faith and our feelings of a good conscience in Christ. As our faith and conscience grows stronger our inner man is strengthened. It is strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit of God within us.

And it is according to the wealth of God’s glory that he grants to us to be strengthened that way. The infinite wealth of God’s glory includes his power to do anything with what he created. And part of that glory is the great love he has for us. And because of that love he enables us to be strengthened with power for the inner man.

And in the heavenly world, that strengthened power of our inner man will be manifested with Christ as we reign with him in his throne. It is only in this life that we, the children of God, are weak and lowly in power. For this is the devil’s world, because it was given to him by sinful mankind.

## Being filled in the fullness of God

- **Having been rooted and grounded in love, so that ye may be able to grasp with all the sanctified what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to become aware of the love of the Christ, which transcends knowledge, so that ye may be filled in all the fullness of God** (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Being rooted and grounded refers to being firmly and solidly established. We are rooted and grounded in love because love is what unites us all together in righteousness. Love—the love of God and Christ for us, and our love for them and for each other—is the great force that unites and establishes us, and enables us to be filled in the fullness of God, including his wisdom and his power. Genuine love is the great force that unites all good things together.

Being rooted and grounded in love also enables us (1) **“to grasp with all the sanctified what is the breadth and length and depth and height,”** and (2) **“to become aware of the love of the Christ.”** In that passage Paul mentioned four directions of space, although there are only three dimensions of space. His use of the words depth and height refer to the up and down of one dimension as we define it. Perhaps he mentioned the depth and the height separately because together they symbolize all inclusiveness.

Paul’s mention of all the dimensions of space symbolizes our ability to grasp all of the aspects of reality. As believers in Christ (the sanctified), with our knowledge of the word of God (the Bible), we are able to know and understand about the realities of both heaven and earth. We are able to know and understand the meaning and purpose of life. We are able to know and understand how best to live in this world, and how to live so that we can have eternal life in the heavenly world.

Moreover, that knowledge and understanding enables us to become aware of the love of the Christ, which transcends knowledge. Our awareness of the love of the Christ is more than just knowledge. It includes a feeling in our hearts, a living force that energizes us to live right and do good works. And that force transcends knowledge. For unbelievers can have knowledge about God and his holy word. But their knowledge is not only shallow and incomplete (and full of errors), but it is sterile and dead. It has no power to influence them for anything good.

We need to be rooted and grounded in love, so that our knowledge of existence can be complete, and we can become aware of the love of the Christ. That enables us to be filled in all the fullness of God. Paul’s use of the expression “fullness of God” refers to the complete development of our spirit, its perfection.

James spoke of that, when he 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). James was speaking of our spiritual perfection and completeness, not anything earthly. And that seems to be what Paul meant here by our being filled in all the fullness of God.

## Able to do all that we ask or think

- **Now to him who is able to do above extraordinary—above all things that we ask or think—according to the power that works in us, to him is the glory in the church in Christ Jesus for all generations of the age of the ages. Truly** (Ephesians 3:20-21).

The word extraordinary means far beyond the ordinary. And Paul said that God is able to do above extraordinary. He is able to do above all things that we ask or even imagine. And he will do above all things that we ask—if we ask according to his will. That means we should always ask for things that are good and right and just. And when we ask we must also be patient, because God answers our requests in his own good time and way.

God is able to do above extraordinary according to the power that works in us, which power is his Holy Spirit. Regarding powers that work in us, remember what Paul said about the spirit that now works in sinners, the sons of disobedience: **“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).

A spirit is energy, and power is the manifestation of energy. The ruler of the power of the air works in the sons of disobedience. But the power of God works in us. God is able to do above extraordinary according to the same power that works in us. The power of God that transforms our hearts and our lives can also transform the world. His power that works in us can also do things above extraordinary, even above all things that we ask or think.

And Paul said **“to him is the glory in the church in Christ Jesus for all generations of the age of the ages. Truly.”** To God is the glory in the church in Christ Jesus. God is hated and rejected in the world. But in the church he is glorified. And in the church he will be glorified for all generations to come.

And the church is glory to him. Remember how it was through the church that the manifold wisdom of God was made known in heaven: **“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 ...”** (Ephesians 3:10). The church is glory to God because the church is his kingdom, with which he is harvesting souls to be his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

The expression “the age of the ages” appears to mean the all-encompassing age that includes every other age. It seems to be a kind of superlative to emphasize that God will always forevermore be the glory in the church of Christ Jesus.

## Walk worthily of your calling

- **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** (Ephesians 4:1-2).

Paul does not explain where he was in bondage, but many believe it was in Rome. What he wanted them to know was that even though he was a prisoner in the Lord, he called upon

them to walk worthily of the calling in which they were called. Persecution against him never kept Paul from encouraging others to be faithful.

Every Christian has been called by the Lord, which means we have accepted his invitation to follow him. And every Christian must walk worthily of that great calling. Although we have been called to be children of Almighty God, we must act **“with all humility and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing each other in love.”**

We must never become puffed-up with pride about our special relationship with God. We must always remember it is a gift from him. It is not something we can earn or deserve. He called us because he loves us. And he loves us because we love him and his truth and righteousness. Therefore, follow the steps of our Savior and show all humility and meekness.

Remember what he said about himself: **“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).

We also must always walk worthily with longsuffering, forbearing each other in love. Longsuffering involves patiently enduring sorrow and grief. God is very longsuffering toward all of us who have offended him. But the purpose of his longsuffering is for us to repent and be saved. For Paul said to the Romans, **“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).

Therefore, our longsuffering and forbearance toward each other should also be used to encourage repentance. It should not be used simply to ignore and tolerate any wrongdoing. That kind of longsuffering is cowardly.

Paul also said our longsuffering and forbearance toward each other should be in love. That must always be the motive of our heart toward each other. We are the chosen people of God. He is our heavenly Father, and we are spiritual brothers. Therefore, whatever we do toward each other must be done in love.

## Keep the unity of the Spirit

**Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, one body and one spirit** (Ephesians 4:3-4).

Paul’s comment about keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace is one of his most beautiful and famous passages of scripture. God wants us to work toward keeping the unity of the spirit. As every living thing has a spirit, so the church as one body in Christ has a spirit.

Remember, a spirit is energy. And bodies can have several kinds of spirits within them. Our personal body has its fleshly spirit; it has our divine spirit in it; it has the Holy Spirit in it; and it has the Spirit of God and Christ in it. A country has its spirit, and the church has its spirit, a spirit like that of Christ. Moreover, each congregation of the church has its spirit (see Revelation 2-3 for examples of that). Different spirits energize differently. Countries can have a militant spirit or a peaceful spirit. They can have an industrious spirit or a stagnant spirit. Countries can have both a militant spirit and an industrious spirit.

The spirit of the church is the energy of the church, both its quantity and its quality. And the spirit of the church should be one of unity in all the congregations. Therefore, Paul urged us to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, and keep it in the bond of peace.

It is a constant struggle, because the potential for division in this world is always present. But our commitment to the bond of peace will help keep the unity, as long as that bond is faithful to the truth of the good news of Christ, which we have recorded for us in the Bible. And a genuine congregation of the church can always be recognized by that standard.

Paul also said there was one body as well as one spirit. He wrote about that one body, when he said to the brothers at Rome, **“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).

The church is a kind of mega-body of which each one of us is a part. As Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **“Now ye are the body of Christ, and body-parts individually”** (First Corinthians 12:27).

## The oneness of the church

- **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 4:4-6).

God called us out of the world, through the good news of Christ, to be in his kingdom, which is not of this world. As Jesus said to Pilate, **“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). The kingdom of God in the world is called the church. It is in the world, but not of the world.

Paul said we should endeavor to keep the unity of its spirit in the bond of peace. He then listed six things about its oneness, to which we were called:

one hope of our calling  
 one Lord  
 one faith  
 one immersion  
 one God and Father of all

We were called to a true hope, because there is no true hope in this life. As Solomon said about it: **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Regardless of how we live, we are all going to die and lose everything in this world. There is no true hope in this life. Our true hope is for eternal life in heaven, to which God has called us through the good news of Christ.

We were called to one Lord, Jesus Christ. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“... to us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we for him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him”** (First Corinthians 8:6). And the heavenly agent said to John about him, **“... he is Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14).

We were called to one faith. Every man lives by some kind of faith, commonly called a world view or a philosophy of life. Our faith, our world view, our philosophy of life, is founded upon God and his holy word, and upon Christ and his good news of our salvation. That is the one true faith, the one true world view, the one true philosophy of life.

We were called to one immersion. Although the Bible speaks of several kinds of immersions, our salvation is a result of our obedience to the command that we be immersed in water for the remission of our sins. The New Testament record contains many passages that proclaim that one immersion to which we were called. False teachers have promoted substitutes for that immersion, such as sprinkling and pouring. But there is only one true immersion that is acceptable to God, which is immersion in water for the remission of our sins.

And we were called to one God and Father of all. God is the heavenly Father of every man born into the world. However, when we first sin we lose our eternal sonship with him. And it is only through his Son, Jesus Christ, that he will adopt us to be his eternal sons again. We were called to one God and Father of all so that he will also be our Father in heaven.

## The grace given to each of us

- **But the grace was given to each of us, according to the measure of the gift of the Christ. Therefore he says, Having ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men** (Ephesians 4:7-8).

Our calling to be sons of God for eternity was according to his wonderful grace. It was not something we deserved lest any man boast. And his grace includes gifts from the Christ. For after Jesus ascended on high to the throne of God he gave gifts to men, gifts of the Holy Spirit. And those gifts were according to measure, which means they were not the same for each man.

Remember, Paul spoke of those different gifts when he wrote to the Romans: **“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).

The passage Paul quoted in that scripture of Ephesians was from the Psalms: **“The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the sanctuary. Thou have ascended on high. Thou have led captivity captive. Thou have received gifts among men, yea, among the rebellious also, that Jehovah God might dwell with them”** (Psalm 68:17-18).

The psalm that Paul mentioned tells how Jehovah led his people out of Egyptian bondage. His ascension on high apparently refers to Jehovah’s presence on mount Sinai. Leading captivity captive refers to the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt. Jehovah took captive their captivity when he led them out.

Paul applied another meaning to that passage. Jesus ascended on high after his resurrection. And the captivity he led captive was our captivity to condemnation because of our sins. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote about that, when he said about Christ, **“Since therefore the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he also himself like-**

**wise shared the same things, so that through death he might make him who has the power of death impotent, that is, the devil. And he might liberate these, as many as throughout all their lifetime were deserving of bondage, with a specter of death”** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

There are many examples in the New Testament when alternate meanings were given to passages from the Old Testament, not in contradiction, but to reveal their richness of meaning. For some passages have multiple meanings, all of which are true and non-contradictory.

Another example is about the Passover, which originally referred to the time when God destroyed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. If the Israelites sacrificed a male lamb, and put its blood on their door posts, the plague of death would pass over them. However, Paul referred to the Passover with a new meaning, when he said, **“For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”** (First Corinthians 5:7). Christ is our Passover because it was by his blood sacrifice that enables us to escape spiritual death.

## He who descended also ascended high

- **And what is the ascended, except that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the same man who ascended high above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things** (Ephesians 4:9-10).

What Paul means by descending into the lower parts of the earth is being buried. The upper parts of the earth include everything above the surface. The lower parts include everything below the surface. Hence, simply being placed in the sepulcher is what was meant by Jesus descending into the lower parts of the earth; he was below the surface. And because of his willingness to endure that death and burial, in obedience to the Father, God raised him high above the heavens to his right hand in his throne.

Moreover, Jesus’ sacrificial life in the world of perfect obedience to the Father also enabled him to fill all things. Jesus filled all things by fulfilling and completing the grand purpose of God for his creation. Remember, that had been a great mystery.

The book of Hebrews speaks about that fulfillment, when it says, **“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.**

**“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 2:7-10).

## Various workmen for the church

- **And indeed he gave the apostles, and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of the sanctified, for the work of ministry, for edification of the body of the Christ ...** (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Paul listed five different kinds of roles that God gave for the work of the church:

the apostles  
 the prophets  
 the evangelists,  
 the shepherds  
 the teachers

He also said those works were for

the perfection of the sanctified  
 the work of the ministry  
 the edification of the body of the Christ

The apostles completed the foundation begun by Christ, the chief corner. For after his ascension into heaven they established his church, and through their labors the New Testament was written. There were only twelve apostles, and they had no successors. The claim of apostolic succession is a false claim. And God will condemn any man who makes it.

Prophets are men who speak the word of God. Before the New Testament was written the prophets were given various supernatural powers in order to verify they were speaking the word of God. However, those powers are no longer given because we have the testimony of the New Testament. And any claim otherwise is false. Speaking the word of God is still an important role in the church. And any man who performs that service can be called a prophet.

Evangelists are men who go about proclaiming the good news of Christ. And that too remains an important role in the church. Men can serve more than two roles in the church. For example, the apostles were also evangelists. Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, and he was also an active evangelist.

The shepherds of the church are also called elders or overseers. They are men who serve to oversee the work of the different congregations. Each congregation is to have its own independent shepherds. The Bible says nothing about such offices as Bishops, where men supervise several different congregations. The office of Bishop was added by ambitious and aggressive men who sought greater authority for themselves. Jesus warned about such men.

Teachers also serve a very important role in the church. Teachers will always perform an essential service, not only in the church but virtually everywhere. For we are all born ignorant. And being taught is the best way to learn what we need to live and progress. Any society or group that does not teach will die.

One of the three works that Paul listed involves the perfecting of the sanctified. Every true Christian has been sanctified by God. And we virtually all begin as babes in Christ. As Peter 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 need to grow and develop to perfection in our spirit.

The second of the three works that Paul listed involves the work of the ministry. That work is about bringing new souls into the body of Christ, as well as doing other good works for the church. The New Testament record gives many examples and admonitions about the kinds of good works the churches should do in its service to Christ.

For example, remember what Jesus said about the great 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.**

**"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 third of the three works that Paul listed involves the edification of the body of Christ. The church is now the body of Christ upon the earth. And we should do what we can for its edification. We should strive to save the lost and add new souls into the church. We should work to keep the unity of its spirit in the bond of peace. And we should do whatever else we can to build up and strengthen the church and all of its members within the realm of truth and righteousness.

## To a perfect man

- **... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to a standard of stature of the fullness of the Christ** (Ephesians 4:13).

Jesus gave his church **"the apostles, and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers"** so that we would (1) all attain to the unity of the faith, and (2) the knowledge of the Son of God. And that was for us to become a perfect man, which perfect man is according to a standard of stature of the fullness of the Christ.

Without having such men to teach and guide the development of the church we could not be united in our faith, nor could we attain to the knowledge of the Son of God. It is the absence of righteous men to serve those roles that those who believe are now divided in their faith, and lacking in the genuine knowledge of Christ.

Of course, the apostles have long since departed this world, but what they taught is still available to us in the words of the New Testament. And prophets are now simply men who proclaim the word of God, which can be done by any man who grows in his knowledge of the Bible. Evangelism can still be done by knowledgeable and talented men to help the church grow. Shepherds are the elders who oversee the different congregations. And teachers will always be a vital part of our spiritual lives.

When righteous men perform those necessary tasks, then our faith in Christ will be united. And it is the duty of us all to strive to attain that unity. The New Testament record contains many passages urging us to be united together in Christ, united in our faith. Moreover, when righteous men perform those necessary tasks, then the church will attain to the knowledge of the Son of God, the genuine knowledge of him and his good news of our salvation. Denominationalism has always been condemned by the word of God.

As we attain the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, those things help us approach to a perfect man. For we are to strive to be perfect, as Jesus the Son of God was perfect. For Jesus said to his disciples, **“Ye therefore shall be perfect, even as your Father in the heavens is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48).

Jesus is the standard of our stature. He is the standard by which we can determine the level of our achievement of his fullness, of his perfection. He is the very essence of God. For the book of Hebrews says about him and the Father, **“Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights”** (Hebrews 1:3). And we must all strive to be like him in our spirit.

## No longer be childish

- **So that we may no longer be childish, tossed about and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in craftiness with the methodology of error** (Ephesians 4:14).

We are to be childlike in innocence, in humbleness, in open-mindedness, in eagerness to learn. But we are not to be childish in ignorance, impulsiveness, and gullibility. Being childish makes us vulnerable to being manipulated and preyed upon. It also causes us to be **“tossed about and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men.”**

Winds of doctrine refer to the ever changing ideas and beliefs that men with selfish ambition are constantly promoting. Fads and fashions are examples of the more superficial and flighty things that men promote. The various religious and philosophical ideas that arise and beset us are like the wind, generating dangerous doctrines. They create dust storms that darken the minds of the childlike.

They are cleverly crafted using the methods of error to deceive. Their ideas and beliefs are like the clever tricks that are created by magicians and illusionists. They appear to be true, but careful examination always exposes them as crafty tricks. If you love truth and righteousness, use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to combat those many winds of doctrine. For they spawn all manner of storms that are dangerous to our souls.

Like the wind, ideas can be exceedingly powerful, and they can produce much good or much evil. The huge population of India is kept backward because they are in the grip of false religion. America was able to take a wilderness land and quickly create a mighty nation because the people believed in Christ and the Bible. However, now that they have forsaken God to embrace the false philosophy of humanism, our country is becoming weaker and more spiritually decadent.

## The growth of the body

- **But being truthful in love, we may cause all things to grow for him who is the head—the Christ—from whom the whole body, joined together and united together through every connection of the supply, according to the working of each one part within a standard, makes the growth of the body for the construction of itself by love (Ephesians 4:15-16).**

In contrast to the trickery of men with their methodology of error, we as children of God should be truthful in love. Crafty men are proud and deceitful, with an attitude of disdain toward their victims. We should enlighten and inform for the purpose of benefitting others. Doing that causes things to grow for Christ, because knowledge used righteously brings productivity. Christ, the Son of God, is Lord of everything, and he wants us all to be fruitful and grow. Indeed, fruitfulness and growth are the signs of life, and God is the origin and sustainer of life.

Paul again used the body for an analogy of the church, which is the kingdom of God in the world. Christ is the head of the body and we are its parts. Paul said the whole body is joined together and united together through every connection of the supply. Our vascular system consists of our heart and all the blood vessels that branch from it. According to what I have read, we have about sixty thousand miles of blood vessels, including the very tiny capillaries, all united together. Thus, our whole body is certainly joined together and united together through our enormous vascular system. And that system supplies all of the parts of the body with the necessary substances they need, as well as serving a cleansing function.

Our whole body is also joined together and united together through our complex nervous system, which also branches throughout the body. According to what I have read we have about one hundred billion nerve cells in our brain and about fifty miles of nerve fibers that spread from it throughout the body. Therefore, our whole body is certainly joined together and united together through our enormous nervous system. And it supplies the internal communications of the body to coordinate all of its parts, and to enable us to be able think, to be aware, and to act.

Paul also said that each one part of the body works within a standard. Recent discoveries in science have found that each of the trillions of living cells that compose our body contain complex chemicals called chromosomes. Those chromosomes contain the information needed for the body to operate. They provide the standard used to guide both the development and the functioning of the body.

Although each cell contains the same chromosomes (except the few germ cells which are only partial until they are joined together during conception), nevertheless, the various

cells of the body somehow develop in their own special way: blood cells, nerve cells, skin cells, liver cells, muscle cells. And the unified organization of those specialized cells is what creates and composes the body.

In the same way, the word of God, the Holy Bible, is our standard for living. To have a healthy church each member needs to have access to the word of God. And according to our role in life, we are to use the part of that standard of information which applies to us. For example, there are instructions that are only for men and there are instruction that are only for women. There are instructions that are for rulers and there are instruction for followers.

And Christ is the head, from whom the whole body (the church), joined together and united together, **“according to the working of each one part [each disciple] within a standard [the word of God], makes the growth of the body [the church] for the construction of itself by love.”**

Although the cells of our body cannot be said to have a consciousness the way we have, nevertheless, they work together to construct the body by love. Using the standard of the chromosomes, the cells work together, support each other, help each other, and even sacrifice themselves for each other. They truly do function by a spirit of love. However, it is not something they choose; God programmed the cells to be guided by the chromosomes with a spirit of love for the body. On the other hand, having free will we must choose to be guided by the word of God with a spirit of love for the body of Christ.

You may not know that cancer cells are normal cells that have rebelled against the healthy order of the body. Here are some of their characteristics:

Cancer cells proliferate unrestrained

Cancer cells do not obey messages from other cells

Cancer cells do not stick together, but roam unrestricted in the body

Cancer cells do not specialize, but stay immature

Cancer cells can destroy normal cells

Here is the first thing that the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia says about them:

Cancer, known medically as a malignant neoplasm, is a broad group of various diseases, all involving unregulated cell growth. In cancer, cells divide and grow uncontrollably, forming malignant tumors, and invade nearby parts of the body. The cancer may also spread to more distant parts of the body through the lymphatic system or bloodstream. Not all tumors are cancerous. Benign tumors do not grow uncontrollably, do not invade neighboring tissues, and do not spread throughout the body. There are over 200 different known cancers that afflict humans.

In other words, cancer cells are like wretched sinners that rebel against the righteousness of the body. And if they are tolerated in the body, they will eventually destroy it.

That analogy Paul gave comparing our body of flesh to the church reveals an astonishing knowledge about the workings of the body. Remember, Paul wrote about two thousand years ago. The wisdom and the knowledge given in that passage about the body is sufficient for any man with an open mind to see that the Bible is the word of God.

## No longer walk in vanity and darkness

- **This I say therefore, and solemnly declare in the Lord, for you to walk no longer as also the other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the callousness of their heart** (Ephesians 4:17-18).

Paul said that sinners walk in the vanity of their mind. Their minds are filled with vanity because they are darkened in their understanding. They do not understand the truth of God and of Christ and his good news of our salvation. They may have some knowledge about it, but their knowledge is shallow and incomplete. Therefore their minds are darkened in their understanding.

Paul also said they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. Their darkened minds mislead them away from God and his righteousness. Hence, they are alienated from the life of God, and instead they live lives of sin and wickedness. They think what they are doing is best for them. But if they understood how they are alienating themselves from God, and are going to suffer condemnation in the lake of fire after this life is over, many if not most of them would repent in fear and trembling.

Through their ignorance, their minds are darkened in understanding because of the callousness of their hearts. This passage in John's biography of Jesus explains more about them: **"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"** (John 12:37-40).

## Gave themselves over to licentiousness

- **Who, having become callous, gave themselves over to licentiousness for the work of all uncleanness in greed** (Ephesians 4:19).

Sinners make themselves callous. They are not born that way, because we are all born with tender hearts and consciences, although like walking our conscience takes a while to develop. Sinners make themselves callous, and they weaken their consciences. They do those things because of the lusts of their flesh. Remember how Paul warned about that: **"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 ye may want, these things ye may not do"** (Galatians 5:16-17).

By making themselves callous, sinners give themselves over to the lusts of their flesh, which produces all manner of uncleanness. Paul said they do the work of all uncleanness

in greed. Greed is excessive desire for things. And the excessive desires of their flesh commonly give them over to licentiousness, which works all uncleanness.

Have you ever witnessed a man who is inebriated, being intoxicated with alcohol? They never act intelligently or constructively. They always act foolishly and destructively; they always work uncleanness. Indulging in alcoholic beverages is like becoming callous and giving over to licentiousness, which works all the kinds of uncleanness, indulging excessive desires.

Alcohol is a depressant. However, one of its main depressing effects is to depress the inhibitions. The evil desires of the flesh, which we all have, are released by the alcohol. And how the drunkard acts depends upon which of those desires are strongest at the time. It may be anger, or sensual lust, or wild excitement, or frivolity, depending upon the circumstances. But whatever it is, it works all uncleanness in the uninhibited excess of the desire.

Sinners do not need to become inebriated to give themselves over to licentiousness. I used the illustration of a drunkard because it is a more apparent and graphic example of giving over to licentiousness. But sinners do not care about those risks. Their callousness makes them insensitive to the consequences of licentiousness in their quest for pleasure, euphemistically called happiness. They prefer the immediate pleasure of sin instead of the future rewards of God's righteousness. You may be interested in knowing that secular research has shown that one important characteristic of intelligence is the ability to postpone immediate pleasure. They call it deferred gratification, or delayed gratification

## Put on the new man according to God

- **But ye did not so learn the Christ, if indeed ye heard him, and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, for you to put off the old man according to your former conduct, the man who is corrupt according to the desires of deceitfulness, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man according to God, the man who was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth** (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Learning Christ is learning truth, because truth is in Christ. And accepting the truth produces righteousness. We learned Christ when we heard his words and were taught in him. The words of Christ have been preserved for us in the New Testament of the Bible. And when we accept Christ, we put off our old man according to our former conduct. The old man is the one that is ignorant and licentious, working uncleanness.

The old man is corrupt according to the desires of deceitfulness. Deceit is a device used to achieve some evil goal. A morally corrupt man has the desires of deceitfulness. He prefers deceitfulness because it is an easier way to achieve his evil goals.

But we have put off the old man. We learned Christ for us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. The spirit of our mind refers to the character of our thoughts. When we learn Christ we have renewed thoughts. We think and feel differently. We have no desires of deceitfulness, but prefer the truth, hating evil and loving righteousness.

That renewal in the spirit of our minds enables us to put on the new man according to God. Our new man **“was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”** God is the ori-

gin and the ultimate source of all truth and righteousness. And our new man in Christ was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Righteousness is performing things that are good, right, and just. Truth is the correct description of reality, past present and future. Truth is the opposite of deceit. Truth is the professed goal of history, philosophy, and science, but they can be corrupted by ulterior motives. Holiness is integrity and purity. Genuine truth is righteous and holy. And Jesus said, **“Every man who is of the truth hears my voice”** (John 18:37).

## Speak truth with thy neighbor

- **Therefore having put off falsehood, let each man speak truth with his neighbor, because we are body-parts of each other** (Ephesians 4:25).

Societies are organized groups of people that live interdependently. Every civilized man belongs to a society because they are the means by which we survive and progress. Neighbors are not only those who live near us, but they are members of our society. And since a society can be considered a type of body, a mega-body, then we are parts of that body. Thus, we are body-parts of each other.

And being body-parts of each other (the body of society) we should speak truth to our neighbors. It is unhealthy when people are false to each other. A body becomes ill when parts of it misinform and work against other parts. Not long before the destruction of the nation of Israel, the prophet Micah described the character of its people. They had embraced falsehood toward each other.

Here is how Micah described them: **“The devout man has perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood. They hunt every man his brother with a net. Their hands are upon that which is evil to do it diligently. The ruler asks, and the judge asks for a bribe. And the great man, he utters the evil desire of his soul. Thus they weave it together. The best of them is as a brier. The most upright is worse than a thorn hedge.**

**“The day of thy watchmen, even thy visitation, has come. Now shall be their perplexity. Trust ye not in a neighbor. Put ye not confidence in a friend. Keep the doors of thy mouth from her who lies in thy bosom. For the son dishonors the father. The daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s enemies are the men of his own house”** (Micah 7:2-6).

Falsehood is like theft. It is an easier way to achieve your goals. But it is a very destructive moral disease that is deadly to society. When falsehood multiplies, people no longer trust each other. The bond between neighbors breaks, and the society begins to disintegrate. Like killing, falsehood should never be tolerated, except in rare circumstances such as when used against a dangerous enemy.

## Be ye angry and sin not

- **Be ye angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give a place to the devil** (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Notice how Paul did not forbid being angry. It is not wrong to be angry. Indeed, it is wrong to never become angry. Anger is an emotion aroused by being wronged. And anger has the purpose of energizing us to combat wrongdoing. Not becoming angry when being wronged or seeing someone else being wronged is cowardly.

God himself becomes angry when he is provoked. Wrath is strong anger, and the Bible record tells us how sinners provoke the wrath of God. For example, Paul said to the Colossians, **“Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of which the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience, in which ye also once walked when ye lived in them”** (Colossians 3:5-7).

We can be angry when provoked, but Paul said we should never allow our anger to cause us to sin. Anger is not an excuse to sin. It is a sign of maturity and wisdom when a man’s intellect controls his emotions. Anger should not control you, because it will cause you to sin. Anger controls babies and fools.

Paul also warned against harboring anger, saying that it should not go much longer than a few hours. Prolonged emotional arousal is too stressful for the body. The anger will begin to undermine your health. Moreover, it is unhealthy to our soul. It will interfere with the normal functioning and stability of the mind. Efforts can still be made against the cause, but the emotion of anger should be a temporary condition of the mind.

Excessive, uncontrolled, or prolonged anger can all cause a man to give a place to the devil. That means allowing his spirit to cause you to do unrighteousness and injustice. Resist that temptation.

## Thieves steal no more

- **Let the man who steals steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the good, so that he may have to give to him who has need** (Ephesians 4:28).

Stealing is very commonly done, especially when there is temptation. In many countries ordinary people sometimes steal whenever there is a convenient opportunity. As disciples of Christ and children of God we should never steal, regardless of the circumstances. Even when we find something lost, we should look for some way it can be returned.

As disciples of Christ and children of God we should labor, working with our hands the good. Of course, the expression “working with the hands” also includes non-manual labor, such as teaching. By laboring we can also help give to those in need, to those who deserve being helped.

Actually, as disciples of Christ and children of God we should even labor when we are not gainfully employed. Work whatever is good even when you are not required. Look for opportunities to work whatever is good. Working whatever is good is a wonderful habit to develop. It can even become pleasurable. In fact, it can even become a form of recreation, like running or swimming.

Sinners scoff at what they call “do-gooders,” but look at the mess they have made, and they keep making. Think of a society where everyone looks for ways to work whatever is good, instead of doing everything selfishly? What a wonderful place it would be to live.

## No corrupt speech

- **Let no corrupt speech go out of your mouth, rather if there is any good word for edification of the need, so that it may give grace to those who hear** (Ephesians 4:29).

As with all the other sins of the world corrupt speech has greatly increased in my country. The use of vulgar speech, dirty speech, trashy speech, distorted and perverted speech are now commonly heard and accepted. Such speech contributes nothing good. It is like the filthy habits of smoking and tattoos on the body.

Maintaining the integrity of speech is very important. Language is the medium that keeps a society together. Remember what God did after the great flood: **“And Jehovah came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men built. And Jehovah said, Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do. And now nothing will be withheld from them, which they propose to do.**

**“Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand each other’s speech. So Jehovah scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore the name of it was called Babel, because Jehovah there confounded the language of all the earth, and from there Jehovah scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth”** (Genesis 11:5-9).

The English language is becoming progressively more corrupt. Words are perverted, such as the word gay. Gay once meant pleasant and cheerful. It has been corrupted to now mean being a sex pervert, a homosexual. The expression “pro-choice” has been corrupted to mean being in favor of murdering babies. Wicked and bad now mean things that are especially good. Beware of using those words and expressions in their corrupted meaning the way the world does. Using them that way is as bad as uttering vulgar speech.

Keep your speech pure and wholesome. Use good words for edification of whatever need there may be. That will benefit those who hear.

Solomon told of the power of speech. For example, he 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), and, **“Pleasant words are a honeycomb: Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones”** (Proverbs 16:24). He also gave much good advice about speech. For example, he said, **“He who guards his mouth keeps his life. He who opens wide his lips shall have destruction”** (Proverbs 13:3).

## Grieve not the Holy Spirit

- **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which ye are sealed for a day of redemption** (Ephesians 4:30).

Most people believe that God cannot suffer anything. However, that passage makes clear that God does suffer, because it warns us not to grieve his Holy Spirit. And grief is certainly a form of suffering. We cannot affect the body of God, but we can affect his Spirit. Nobody can affect our body when we are speaking to them over a telephone, but they can certainly affect our spirit. They can make us happy or sad. They can give us joy or grief.

And we can grieve the Spirit of God by what we say and do. As offspring of God we can especially grieve his Holy Spirit by sinning against him. Consider how Jesus felt about the people of Jerusalem because they rejected him: **“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).

Jesus wept because he knew that God was going to destroy them for rejecting his only begotten Son whom he sent to them. Therefore, think not that you cannot cause God to grieve. As his adopted children, give him joy and not grief.

Paul said that we were sealed in the Holy Spirit of God for a day of redemption. The day of redemption is when we are taken from the curse of this evil world to live with God as his sons for eternity in the blessed world of heaven. When we repent of our sins and are immersed in water for the remission of them, then God gives us his Holy Spirit to be in us. We become aware of that wonderful Spirit when we are informed of that happening. And also by our awareness of becoming a new man—the change in our attitude, feelings, and thoughts away from sin to the righteousness of God.

The Holy Spirit is also God’s pledge of our salvation. Paul spoke of that when he said, **“Now he who establishes us with you in Christ, and who anointed us, is God. He also is who put a seal on us, and who gave the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts”** (Second Corinthians 1:21-22). The new man of our hearts keeps us aware that God’s Holy Spirit is in us guaranteeing our eternal salvation.

## Take away from you all evil

- **Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and reviling be taken away from you, with all evil** (Ephesians 4:31).

Paul listed five things that should be taken away from us:

all bitterness  
wrath  
anger  
clamor  
reviling

Like many words, bitterness has several meanings. In the Old Testament bitterness refers primarily to strong feelings of sorrow and sadness. However, the kind of bitterness that

Paul warned against involves strong feelings of hatred and resentment. Many things can cause that kind of bitterness in the heart of a man. For other men can experience the same things without becoming bitter. The attitude of bitterness is a defect of character. That kind of bitterness should be removed from the heart of the Christian. Our faith in Christ helps us combat it.

Wrath refers to strong anger. Wrath is dangerous for us, because the wrath of men is always destructive in some way. As James said, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God”** (James 1:19-20). Although being aroused to wrath is virtually impossible to avoid, like operating our car engine at full power, we should not allow wrath to develop easily, and when it does we should use it effectively and end it quickly.

As I mentioned earlier, anger is an emotion designed to arouse us to action. Like our other emotions it can be used for good or for evil. Paul’s warning above about taking all anger away from us obviously refers to habitual anger. There are some people who are easily provoked to anger. Solomon warned about such men, when he said, **“Make no friendship with a man who is given to anger, and thou shall not go with a wrathful man, lest thou learn this ways, and get a snare to thy soul”** (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Clamor refers to unrestrained and excessive outbursts of shouting and yelling. Whatever excites a man can cause him to clamor. Quarrels and arguments often provoke clamor. Remember this example: **“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. 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 23:6-10).

Clamoring is not something we should do. Clamoring is a verbal form of rioting. Wise men do not clamor. Clamoring is for fools. Never be not caught up in a uproar of clamoring or of rioting.

Reviling refers to the use of abusive and contemptuous language when speaking to or about someone. Reviling is also not something we should ever do. We can criticize and rebuke someone when they deserve it. But reviling is an excessive outburst of condemnation. Criticism and rebuking should be done calmly and rationally for the purpose of informing and correcting. Reviling is like thrashing verbally. Wise men do not do it.

Peter said that Jesus never did it: **“For ye were called for this. Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, so that ye should follow his footsteps. Who did no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth. Who, being reviled, did not revile in**

**return. Suffering, he did not threaten, but yielded to him who judges righteously”** (First Peter 2:21-23).

As with Paul’s other lists, that list of five evils was just a sample. Indeed, he ended that list with the words “all evil” to take away. As children of the righteous God and Christ we are to take away all evil from us.

## Become good toward each other

- **And become good toward each other, compassionate, forgiving each other, even as also God in Christ forgave us** (Ephesians 4:32).

We should not only take away all evil from us, but we should become good toward each other. As examples, he mentioned becoming compassionate and forgiving toward each other. And he used the example of how God in Christ forgave us. God in Christ forgave us when we repented and were immersed in water for the remission of our sins.

Our sins were offenses against God, and only he had the right to forgive us. And because of Jesus’ sinless life of perfect obedience, God gave him the right to redeem us from the condemnation caused by our sins. Therefore, God in Christ forgave us. Consequently, we too should forgive each other when they repent and bear fruits worthy of repentance.

## Become imitators of God

- **Become ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children** (Ephesians 5:1).

We become imitators of God when we imitate Christ. And we learn how to imitate him by using the Bible to study how he lived and what he taught. And remember, the teachings of the apostles is included in what Jesus taught. What they taught is included because their words were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Remember what Jesus said to them about being taught all things: **“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).

Paul also told how we were beloved children of God. What an immeasurably wonderful blessing that is! Think about it. We as disciples of Christ are actually beloved children of God, even though he allows us to suffer. For remember, God allows us to suffer in this life because he loves us. For our sufferings make us fully perfect, just as did the sufferings of Christ. As the book of Hebrews says, **“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 2:10). I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Walk in love

- **And walk in love, as also the Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma** (Ephesians 5:2).

Walking in love means doing good for others. And there is no man who ever lived that did more good for others than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He even made the ultimate sacrifice for us by delivering himself up to be crucified on the cross. His offering and sacrifice was a fragrant aroma to God. It gave God great pleasure because it enabled our eternal salvation.

Paul's reference to an offering and a sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma was an allusion to the animal sacrifices that were made upon the altar of the temple in Jerusalem (and the tabernacle in the wilderness before that). The author of Hebrews wrote much about how Christ was an offering and a sacrifice like those upon the altar (see Hebrews 10). Those animal sacrifices gave off a fragrant aroma.

For example, the Old Testament says about burnt offerings, **“And the priest shall burn the whole on the altar, for a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a sweet aroma to Jehovah”** (Leviticus 1:9). That sweet aroma was like that of steaks being cooked on a grill. And everyone in the neighborhood of the altar could experience that fragrant aroma.

### No fornication, uncleanness, or any sin

- **But fornication, and all uncleanness, or greed, shall not even be named among you as befits the sanctified, also indecency, and foolish talking or jesting, things not befitting, but thankfulness instead** (Ephesians 5:3-4).

Paul's use of the word fornication refers to any kind of sexual behavior between a man and a woman outside of marriage. It is an evil sin, but has become very commonly done in this decadent generation. They are blind to its destructive nature. Therefore, they keep suffering from its harmful effects. For example, marriage and child rearing are in shambles. And violence and lawlessness are increasing because of it.

Paul's reference to uncleanness refers, of course, to moral and spiritual uncleanness. Fornication is an example of moral uncleanness. Such uncleanness defiles a man. Jesus explained that, when he spoke about eating with unwashed hands: **“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 15:17-20).

Greed is an evil attitude of the heart. It is an excessive desire for getting or having things. Covetousness is another word for greed. And the last of the ten commandments forbids coveting. God said, **“Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is thy neighbor's”** (Exodus 20:17).

Many good things become bad things when they are in excess. It is good to desire having possessions, but it is wrong to be greedy. Solomon spoke of God's approval of our ownership of good things, when he said, **“Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be fitting is for a man to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor in which he**

labors under the sun all the days of his life which God has given him, for this is his portion.

**“Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life, because God answers him in the joy of his heart”** (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20). But it is wrong to be greedy and want things in excess.

After Paul mentioned those evil things, he said they should not even be named among them. That means people should never associate such things with the church of Christ. There should never be an example of them happening by the disciples of Christ. No Christian should ever be a fornicator, or engage in spiritual uncleanness, or be greedy. Never happening among us befits us as the sanctified of God. God made us holy and separate from the evils of the world. Purity and cleanliness is befitting for us, in contrast to the moral filthiness of the world.

Paul then added the evils of indecency and foolish jesting as things that should not even be named among us. Indecency refers primarily to things that are obscene and offensive to what is considered proper. More things that are indecent are being accepted by this decadent generation. Manners of appearance and speech are becoming more indecent. As befits us as the sanctified of God we should live by the higher and more noble standards of God’s righteousness.

Foolish talking or jesting is also becoming more common during these evil times. It is not something we should ever do. Look around you, and you will see that wise men do not do it. Both Isaiah and Paul used satire, but they never used foolish talking or jesting. Jestings is not rational speech; it is folly. It is another example of doing something that panders to the base pleasures of sinners.

Instead of those evil things we should engage in thankfulness. Thankfulness is both an attitude of the heart and a way of responding. We should always have thankfulness in our hearts for all our blessings. And we should always seek to express our thankfulness to those who deserve it. Whether it be to God who is the ultimate source of all our blessings, or to men who labor and do good things for our benefit. We should be known as a thankful people. For who is not grateful for whatever thanks he receives because of his efforts?

## Not inheriting the kingdom

- **For ye are men who know this, that no fornicator, or unclean man, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and God** (Ephesians 5:5).

Paul had said that fornication, and all uncleanness, or greed, should not even be named among us as befits the sanctified. And in the above passage he said that men who practice such thing have no inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and God. They will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and God in heaven, and they do not belong in any of the congregations of it here upon the earth.

In that passage Paul also told how a covetous man was an idolater. A covetous man is one who desires things in excess. A man who is greedy and covetous is actually paying homage to material things. It is a form of worshiping them. I have read testimonials about men who were greedy for money. Some of them became millionaires. Their advice to those who wanted to become very rich was that they would need to sacrifice everything else and labor only for money. In other words, they would need to worship money above all things. Thus, they would be idolaters of money.

Any man who has an excessive desire for things, worships those things. They are his god and he is an idolater.

## God's wrath comes because of these things

- **Let no man deceive you by empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Do not become ye therefore partakers with them** (Ephesians 5:6-7).

In the past natural disasters were called acts of God. Few people these days believe that the natural disasters of the world are a result of the wrath of God, but the Bible says they are. Natural disasters are plagues. And the book of Revelation tells why there are plagues: **“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).

God sends plagues against men so they will repent of their sins. But they rarely do repent of them, and when they do repent it does not last long. The book of Judges gives the early history of Israel, and it tells how often the people cycled from sinning, to suffering from some plague sent by God. They only repented to escape the plague, because after the plague they went back to sinning.

Paul said because of sinfulness **“the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”** Therefore, let no man deceive you by empty words that say the sins of the world have nothing to do with its plagues. Remember the great flood (see Genesis 6:12). Remember Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 18:20-21).

Paul also warned us not to become partakers of sin with the people of the world. They will tempt you to sin in many ways. Their sins are masqueraded as acceptable forms of pleasure. They will claim they are normal, and everybody does them. They will say they are harmless. And they will not accept you if you do not join them in their sins. Indeed, they will condemn you with many false accusation if you resist them.

Nevertheless, never become partakers with them. Remember these words: **“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. 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 16:24-26).

## Walk as children of light

- **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 (Ephesians 5:8-10).**

Those who live in sin are living in darkness in the sense that they are ignorant, being blind to the truth of God. They are in darkness because they have hardened their hearts against God and his righteousness. Remember, Jesus only spoke to the multitudes in parables. And he explained why to his disciples: **“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).**

As disciples of Christ, we are able to see the truth of God. Therefore, we should walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable to the Lord. Our obedience to the word of God will make us righteous. And the good fruits of our righteousness will prove what is acceptable to the Lord. We will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is in us. And that fruit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

Remember what Jesus said about shining our light: **“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 5:14-16).**

## Rebuke the unfruitful works of darkness

- **And do not associate with the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead even rebuke them. For it is disgusting even to speak of the things happening by them secretly (Ephesians 5:11-12).**

The unfruitful works of darkness are all the evil consequences of sin and wickedness. We are not to associate with them. We are even to rebuke them. And that is why the world hates us. Remember what Jesus said to his brothers, who did not believe in him: **“The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil” (John 7:7).** The world could not hate his brothers because they did not believe in him. However, the time can when they did believe and were hated.

We who have lived among Christians all our lives have been sheltered from the many disgusting things sinners do. The so-called reality shows on television have revealed some of those disgusting things. However, the worst of them are too disgusting to be broadcast. Our laws (so far) prevent them from being seen in public broadcasting.

However, various book and magazine publishers and the internet do reveal them. I have gotten a glimpse of such things, and they are too disgusting to even write about. I remember as a young child spending a couple of summers with my grandparents who lived in the countryside of Arkansas. They only had an outhouse for a toilet. I remember looking down through one of the two openings in the seat of it. Several feet below the pit was filled with slimy body waste that was covered with living flies that were on and buzzing around it.

I only mention that to illustrate how many of the sins that men commit are equally disgusting. Equally disgusting is that the spirit of some men is like those flies; they are attracted to such filth. If you are offended by my brief exposure of such filth, remember, God is constantly exposed to seeing such filth. For nothing is hidden from him. And he hates such things even more than we do. That will help you appreciate why he is sometimes provoked to wrath against sinners to destroy such filth.

### Awake, thou who sleep

- **But all things exposed are revealed by the light, for everything that is seen is light. Therefore he says, Awake, thou who sleep. And arise from the dead, and the Christ will shine upon thee** (Ephesians 5:13-14).

Light is the medium that stimulates our eyes to give us vision. Even when we use other things like x-rays, what they expose must be converted to light before they are revealed to us. Therefore, all things exposed are revealed by the light. Everything that is seen is light, because that is all our eyes can detect. When I see my wife, it is the light reflected from her that I see. We can see nothing without light, but with it we can see everything around us. Our eyes are the major source of our sensory awareness. Indeed, the nerve fibers from our eyes are about fifty times more numerous than those from all our other senses combined.

The words that Paul quoted about sleeping and rising are not found in the Old Testament. The nearest thing is this passage from Isaiah: **“Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of Jehovah has risen upon thee”** (Isaiah 60:1). Perhaps those words Paul quoted were an admonition uttered by someone during New Testament times that had become a popular saying or an adage that was widely quoted among Christians.

Nevertheless, they are words of wisdom, and they teach an important lesson, because ignorance is a kind of sleep. Like a sleeping man, an ignorant man is unaware. The call to awake is a call to learn. Death is also a kind of sleep; indeed, Jesus spoke of death as sleep. Therefore, learning is kind of like rising from the dead. And learning about Christ is indeed like rising from the dead, because all who are without Christ are spiritually dead. For example, Paul said about widows, **“But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives”** (First Timothy 5:6).

Unlike being physically dead, a man who is dead because of ignorance can resurrect himself by learning about Christ. Therefore, the admonition is to awake and rise from the dead. And when a man does that, then Christ will shine upon him. Christ will shine upon every man who lifts himself out of the death of sin. For the light of Christ enables us to perceive and understand things that sinners cannot. Knowing Christ and his good news enlightens a man like nothing else can. And that gives us great strength for righteousness.

## Watch carefully how ye walk

- **Therefore watch carefully how ye walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Because of this do not become foolish, but understanding what is the will of the Lord (Ephesians 5:15-17).**

A drunkard is like a man who is half asleep. His drinking stupefies him, and makes him walk unsteady and foolishly. Sinners are like drunkards in their spirit. They live carelessly and foolishly, doing things that cause trouble. In contrast the light of Christ makes us wise so that we can walk steadily and effectively.

Paul urged us to watch carefully how we walk. Remember, walking symbolizes our progression through life. And we need to watch carefully how we live, and live wisely. Paul also said we should redeem the time. To redeem means to buy back or recover. And since we have all misused our time in some ways, Paul admonished us to recover the time we have remaining from misuse. Of course, time can never be recovered literally. But we can salvage or save the time we have remaining from being misused in the future.

Paul said we need to do that because the days are evil. We live in an evil world. It is evil because of rebellion against God. Therefore, we need to watch carefully how we walk, and live wisely. Like drunkenness, foolish living destroys a man. Understanding what is the will of the Lord will make us wise. And that will bring us many blessings. In his book of Proverbs Solomon spoke at length about the many blessings of wisdom.

Therefore, dear reader, study the word of God from the Bible so that you can understand what is the will of the Lord. Awake and rise from the dead, and walk in the light of Christ. For walking in his light leads us to life in heaven where there is no death.

## Speak to yourselves with music to the Lord

- **And do not become intoxicated with wine, during which is debauchery, but be filled in the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and striking strings in your heart to the Lord, expressing thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the God and Father, submitting yourselves to each other in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:18-21).**

Paul warned against becoming intoxicated with wine, although he did not forbid drinking it altogether. The danger of becoming intoxicated with anything is that it causes debauchery, as well as a host of other sins. The Bible does not condemn drinking alcoholic beverages, but it does condemn becoming intoxicated with them. And that virtually always happens during drinking parties, which sinners love.

We are to be filled in the Spirit. We become filled in the Spirit as we learn the word of God, and increase our motivation for righteousness. For God's Holy Spirit manifests itself in our knowledge-based thinking and in our feelings, guiding us to live right in the sight of God. That is how we can sense his Spirit within us. Nevertheless remember, the Holy

Spirit no longer enables any man to perform any kind of miracle. The time for that was while the church was first beginning and the New Testament was being written.

Paul also commanded us to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and striking strings in our heart to the Lord. Singing involves uttering words with a melody. Adding a melody to our words has several advantages. It helps us remember the words. It makes the words more pleasing to us. It makes it easier for us to speak in unison. When we sing it unites us both intellectually and emotionally.

There are many psalms contained in the Old Testament record. The book of Psalms has one hundred and fifty. The words have been recorded for us, but whatever melody they used has not. The invention of musical notes did not happen until long after the Bible was written. However, the melody of the psalms in the Bible is unimportant. Any appropriate melody could be used with them for singing. However, I have only heard a few of the psalms that were given a melody.

The psalms of the Bible were mainly used to praise God and to utter prayers to him. The psalms of the Bible speak of universal and timeless things about us. They are marvelous models that can be used to help when new songs are created.

Paul said we should speak to ourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. However, he does not seem to be identifying three different types of singing. They are simply different words about the same thing; namely, words about God that are set to melody or perhaps to poetic rhyming or some other kind of rhythm.

The expression “striking strings” is a literal translation of the Greek word. Most of the other translations say “make melody,” which is what striking musical strings would do. Notice how Paul said we should strike strings (to make melody) in our hearts. Whenever we praise God and pray to him it should always be from the heart. Simply uttering the words (like ritual chanting) is not what he wants.

Paul also said we should express thanks always for all things in the name of God and Christ. Remember what Paul said about all things for us: **“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).

Paul was even thankful for his sufferings. Remember this passage: **“And he [the Lord] said to me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made fully perfect in weakness. More gladly therefore I will boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of the Christ may reside in me. Therefore I am pleased in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in restrictions, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong”** (Second Corinthians 12:9-10).

It is exceedingly difficult to express thanks for things like our sorrows and pains (the unavoidable ones). Yet whatever happens to us works for our good. Jesus suffered enormously during the time of his betrayal and crucifixion. He even prayed beforehand that it would not happen. Nevertheless, he did endure it for our sakes. Because it was through his crucifixion that he is now able to save our souls. Even the terrible crucifixion of Christ worked for our good. As difficult as it is, we must keep our faith in God and try to express thanks to him for all things, both the joyful and the sorrowful.

Nevertheless remember, sorrow and pain is like bondage: if they can be prevented or avoided, then we should certainly avoid them. Taking pleasure in sorrow and pain is evil.

When Paul mentioned God and Christ, he spoke of Jesus as our Lord, and God as our Father. God is our Father because he has adopted us to be his children. And Jesus is our Lord because to be faithful children of God we must obey and serve his Son Jesus Christ.

Paul also commanded us to submit ourselves to each other in the fear of Christ. That means we should be obedient to whoever has authority among us. The only way to maintain peace and order is to submit to those who have authority. The modern ideology of egalitarianism has spawned much division and disorder, especially among husbands and wives. Our evil rulers have robbed husbands of their authority with a devastating effect on marriage.

Paul also spoke of having fear of Christ. There are many passages that command us to fear God. This is the only one that also commands us to fear Christ. We are to love them both, but also fear them both. Fear and love can easily go together. For the kind of fear we should have with them is one of being aware of the dire and deadly consequences of opposing them.

When we are faithful to them then that fear is simply in the background of our consciousness as a safeguard against evil temptations that would cause us to sin. Therefore, that kind of fear helps us love them more. When we are faithful, do we not love them more when we know that they will use their fearsome power to punish all who sin against them, especially those who persecute and torment us?

## A husband is head of the wife

- **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. But as the church is subject to the Christ, so also the wives to their own husbands in everything** (Ephesians 5:22-24).

The popular doctrine of the world called feminism teaches the exact opposite of that command. That evil doctrine has become so pervasive that most people who claim to believe in Christ now virtually ignore that command. As with the command to be immersed in water for the remission of sins, they find ways to justify themselves to ignore and dismiss it.

What woman today compares the authority of her husband over her with that of Christ over the church? The nearest I have seen of women who submitted themselves properly to their husbands was the example of the pre-war Japanese. Certainly there are some other modern women who have been properly obedient to that command, but they are few and far between.

For those who want the truth there are several other places in the New Testament that teach wives to submit to their husbands. Consider these words of Peter: **“Likewise the wives, being subordinate to their own husbands, so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they will be gained without a word by the behavior of the wives, observing, in fear, your pure behavior.**

**“Of which let it not be the outward world of braiding of hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel, but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible, of the meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.**

**“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 3:1-6).

That command shows how much a wife should honor and submit herself to her husband. I do want to say that it would not be wise during these times for a wife to literally call her husband lord. The reason is because the word lord now almost exclusively refers to God. Hence, to comply with the principle of that command, it would be wiser for a wife to address her husband as sir. I say more about that command in my comments about that passage in First Peter.

Modern women, blinded by the perverted values of the world, choke on even addressing their husbands as sir. They stumble on such words because they do not consider their husbands to be their head as Christ is head of the church. Modern women have prostituted themselves with our sinful government rulers, voting them in office so they will be their providers and protectors. Nevertheless for us, as Christ is head of the church and the savior of it, so the husband is head of his wife and her provider and protector.

No doubt one reason why many wives do not submit themselves to their husbands is because their husbands do not care for them. No doubt also the reason many husbands do not care for their wives is because they do not submit to them. That produces a vicious cycle: the wife does not submit to her husband, and so the husband does not protect and care for his wife; the husband does not protect and care for his wife, and so the wife does not submit to her husband. The spiritually strongest of them can break that evil cycle by being obedient to Christ. God will judge the disobedient.

Notice how Paul said that the wives were to be subject to their own husbands in everything, just as the church is subject to Christ. A wife can reason with her husband, and plead with him about various things. But she cannot argue and disobey him, unless what he does is wrong in the eyes of Christ. No wife should submit herself to her husband in anything that is wrong. Obedience to God should always be our top priority.

## Christ loved the church and cleansed it

- **Husbands, love your own wives even as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it, so that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the word, so that he might present it to himself, the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and unblemished** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

As Paul emphasized the obedience of the wives to their husbands, so he also emphasized the love husbands were to have for their wives. And he used the example of how Christ so love the church that he delivered himself up for it. His great sacrifice enabled him to redeem us and cleanse us from our sins. We are cleansed with the washing of water when

we repent and are immersed in obedience to him. And that happens by the word which he taught. For it is the word of his good news that enables us to believe and obey him.

And having cleansed us that way Jesus can present the church to himself pure and clean. Paul said it was **“the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and unblemished.”** That cleansing is not the washing of the body of flesh but of the spirit. It purifies our spirit and makes us clean and holy before God. And that cleansing also means we must put on the new man and forsake the old man of sin. Our behavior must always be pure and right in the sight of God.

## Husbands love their wives as their own bodies

- **So ought the husbands to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as also Christ the church, because we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones** (Ephesians 5:28-30).

There is nothing more a part of a man in this life than his own body. And every man nourishes and cherishes it, all except those whose minds are severely deranged. And since the Bible says that a man and his wife are one flesh, then the husband should nourish and cherish his wife as he would his own body. If a man loved his wife as his own body, and nourished and cherished her in the same way, that would make it much easier for her to be submissive to him in everything.

Christ loves the church, and nourishes and cherishes it, because the church is the body of Christ in the world. And we as his disciples are parts of his body, the church. Paul even emphasized how we are parts of the body of Christ by saying that we are the parts of his flesh and of his bones.

Knowing that we are the body parts of Christ upon the earth, we should so live as to be worthy of that supreme honor. Representing him that way is a grave responsibility. It means we must always live spiritually and morally pure and right. It means we should do what we can to promote his cause in the world. It means we should do nothing that would bring reproach upon us. It means the world should be able to see what Jesus is like by how we live.

## The two will be in one flesh

- **Separate from 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. This mystery is great, but I speak for Christ and for the church. Nevertheless ye also, each one in particular, shall so love his own wife as himself, and the wife that she fear her husband** (Ephesians 5:31-33).

At the beginning of Creation, when God created the man and the woman, the Bible says about them, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24). Paul quoted that passage to reinforce what he said about husbands loving their own wives as their own bodies. For accord-

ing to that passage the two are one body, one flesh. Which, as Paul said, was a great mystery.

How that oneness of the flesh happens is truly mysterious, but it does somehow happen. The process must occur through the nervous system, which is the organ of our minds. The functioning of our minds is part of the activity of our flesh, and our minds are gradually changed in various ways as we live in the oneness of marriage. And since our bodies are controlled by our nervous system, then somehow our bodies are subtly changed as our minds are changed. Those changes are usually imperceptible, but I have seen examples of when a husband and wife even begin to look like each other.

That mystery is great, but Paul said he was speaking for Christ and for the church. The mystery of the oneness of flesh between a husband and his wife is great, but Paul was also using that example to illustrate the oneness of Christ and his church. The physical oneness of a husband and his wife is a great mystery, but the spiritual oneness of Christ and his church is not a mystery. We can easily understand it by knowing that his spirit is in us. And having his spirit in us (his divine energy working in our minds) helps us to be righteous before God. Remember, I speak much more about spiritual processes in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Children to obey their parents in the Lord

- **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, so that it may become well with thee, and thou will be long lasting on the earth** (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Paul quoted the fifth of the ten commandments, which 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). He said it was the first commandment with promise. However, none of the other nine commandments have a promise with them. The law of Moses contained hundreds of commandments. The ten commandments were the first of them.

Hence, the command to honor thy father and they mother was the first commandment with promise. And that promise says, “... **that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee.**” Paul enlarged that promise to include more than just the Israelites, because that law applies to all of us.

In every land the welfare of children is dependent upon the welfare of their parents. And the welfare of parents is much better when their children honor them. When children are disrespectful and disobedient, that greatly undermines the health and stability of the family. And that makes things ill for the children.

A modern illustration of the harmful effects of disobedience to parents is the growth of violent youth gangs in America, among which life expectancy is very short. Those disobedient and lawless youths do not live long, unless they repent before it is too late.

Notice how Paul commanded children to obey their parents *in the Lord*. Children should not obey parents when they want them to sin. In this spiritually decadent generation of Americans, there are parents who actually teach their children to lie, cheat, and steal. Such

parents are not to be obeyed, nor do they deserve being honored. They need to lose their parenthood, and have their children taken away from them, unless they repent.

## Fathers are not to exasperate their children

- **And ye fathers, do not exasperate your children, but rear them in the training and admonition of the Lord** (Ephesians 6:4).

Fathers have much power over their children. Which makes it easy for fathers to mistreat them. For example, it is a common temptation to vent frustrations on those you have control over. A popular story is that of the frustrated manager who vents his frustration about something on an employee. The employee then becomes frustrated, and when he goes home he vents his frustration on his children. That makes them frustrated, so they vent their frustration on their pets.

Paul warned fathers against exasperating their children. A righteous father endures suffering for the sake of his wife and children. Moreover, he tries to protect them from harm. Therefore he shelters them from his own exasperations. He does not make them suffer the way he does, unless it is unavoidable.

As children of God we are to rear our children in the training and admonition of the Lord. This adulterous generation of Americans has even abandoned the idea of rearing children. They now speak of “parenting” children. Rearing children involves actively working to develop them. Parenting is their preferred term because it diminishes the idea of actively cultivating the development of children. Their philosophy is that the children are like flowers. Give them nurturing, protection, and opportunities, but do not try to mold them in any way. It is another deadly part of the evil philosophy of humanism.

That false philosophy has proven to be a disaster, but the world refuses to admit it. They are like the ancient Israelites who refused to accept what the prophet Jeremiah said that God wanted them to do. Here is part of that story: **“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. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her, without our husbands?**

**“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).

(Regarding the queen of heaven, it is ironic that the Catholic Church has so deified Mary the mother of Jesus as to designate her the queen of heaven. She herself will condemn them on the day of judgment.)

The people of Israel still refused to forsake their false gods even though that was why their country was destroyed. And so they were destroyed in the land of Egypt where they fled for refuge from the armies of the Chaldeans and Babylonians.

Unlike what the world teaches, children are not a different species. They are not like young flowers. They are simply undeveloped humans. And like adults, they too must struggle with the competing forces of their flesh and their spirit. And it is the duty of parents to encourage and guide them in the way of righteousness. It is their duty, not merely to parent them, but to rear them in the training and admonition of the Lord. Admonishing is needed to help combat the evils, both within them and outside of them that seek to lead them astray. Solomon wrote much good advice about child rearing, especially in his book of Proverbs in the Bible.

## Bondmen are to obey their masters

- **Bondmen, be obedient to the masters according to flesh, with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your heart as to the Christ. Not according to eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, bond-serving with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to men** (Ephesians 6:5-7).

Bond service ranges from slavery to salaried employment, with masters ranging from owners to bosses and managers. But regardless of the kind of bond service a man may be under, the instructions that Paul gave still apply. Paul said we are to serve them with fear and trembling.

Of course, we are not commanded to literally tremble. Those words symbolize recognizing the dangers of disobedience. Those who employ us are the source of our support. And disobeying them means losing that support, which could force us into poverty. And that is something to fear and tremble about.

Simplicity of heart means having an attitude that is honest and straightforward. We should obey them without having any hidden craftiness or ulterior motives in our hearts. Obey them with as much genuineness as we do to the Christ.

Eye-service refers to doing thing superficially for the purpose of making a good impression. Its goal is not to be constructive and do good, but to make men think you are. Simplicity of heart does not do eye-service, because eye-service is hypocritical.

We are to be obedient to our employers as serving Christ, doing the will of God from the soul. We are to obey our employers with goodwill, as to the Lord and not to men. For in fact, whenever we do anything that is good and constructive, we are serving the Lord. God wants us all to do things that are good and constructive, whatever they may be.

God is the source of all that is good and constructive. For example, God wants us to build houses for us to live in. But he does not build them for us directly; he does it indirectly. As the psalmist said, **“Unless Jehovah builds the house, they labor in vain who build it”** (Psalm 127:1).

God builds houses through the hands of men. It is the energy of his Spirit plus our bodies that he created that enables houses to be built. There are many places in the Bible that tell how God uses men to achieve his purposes. And doing good and being constructive is part of God’s purpose. Therefore, obeying our employers, doing good and being constructive is indirectly serving the Lord.

## Doing good and receiving it

- **Knowing that whatever good thing each may do, he will receive this from the Lord, whether bondman or freeman** (Ephesians 6:8).

The list of good things that men can do is virtually endless. At the beginning of Creation, Jehovah commanded mankind: **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it ...”** (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, the many things we do to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and have power over it is serving God. And for each one of us, when we serve him, in whatever good thing we do, we will receive from him, whether we are serving other men or are self-employed.

And whatever good thing each of us may do, he will receive this from the Lord. That means God will see that we are properly recompensed for our good labors. How we will be recompensed will vary, but the Lord guarantees we will be.

## Masters toward their bondmen

- **And ye masters, do the same things to them, easing up the threats, knowing also that the master of you yourselves is in the heavens, and there is no partiality from him** (Ephesians 6:9).

Just as bondmen and employees should work as serving the Lord, so masters and managers should rule and manage as to workers of the Lord. Paul also said that masters—men who supervise—should ease up the threats. There is always the temptation of men with power and authority over others to use their power excessively. Too many and too severe threats increase the stress and psychological pressure on laborers, and that is not good.

Paul reminded masters that they too have a master in the heavens. If masters and managers kept that in mind when they were supervising their bondmen and laborers they would be

much less tempted to abuse their power and authority. I have noticed that virtually everyone driving on the highway is more careful when a policeman is in sight. And knowing that God is always watching over us would help us live more carefully and not sin against him.

God is always impartial because partiality is unjust. And remember, justice is the foundation of God's throne. Therefore, we should always be impartial. Remember that when you are tempted to justify yourself when using favoritism. Partiality always creates resentment in others because they know it is unjust.

## Be strong in the Lord and the power of his might

- **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** (Ephesians 6:10-11).

We become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might when we gain knowledge and wisdom from the word of God, and when we allow his Spirit to energize us to apply that wisdom for productive living. Therefore, study the Holy Bible and be zealous to do good so that you can be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, so that you can tap into his infinite strength and power and become more capable of bearing fruit for him. You might be amazed at what you can do.

Paul also commanded us to put on the full armor of God. Paul speaks more about that farther in this book, where he gives examples of different kinds of armor. We need to put on the full armor of God so that we can stand against the wiles of the devil. The devil is God's great adversary, which means he is also our great adversary. And he uses stealth to prey upon men. Deceit is probably his major weapon. Therefore, he uses wiles and craftiness to tempt us and trap us. However, by putting on the full armor of God we will be able to stand against his wiles. Paul tells us how a little farther on.

## Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood

- **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 6:12).

As children of God we are soldiers of Christ fighting in the great spiritual war between God and Satan. It is a good warfare, as Paul said to Timothy, **“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”** (First Timothy 1:18). It is a good warfare because we are fighting for righteousness against evil.

Therefore, we should be good soldiers in that warfare. For Paul also said to Timothy, **“Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”** (Second Timothy 2:3). As children of God we are all soldiers of Christ. And we are expected to fight that good fight. As Paul also said to Timothy, **“Fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12).

Ours is a spiritual warfare, not a material warfare against flesh and blood. Ours is a spiritual warfare against the principal offices and the positions of authority that are the world-rulers of the darkness of this age. A position of authority refers to any office that has rule. And principle offices are those that rank the highest. Those are the rulers of the world.

And our struggle is against those that are part of the darkness of this age, which alas is most of them. We fight not against their flesh, but against their service to the devil. We fight against their deceitfulness. We fight against their many injustices. We fight against how they prey upon the people. We fight against all of their wickedness.

We also wrestle against the spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things. Our knowledge of heavenly things is very limited, including the spiritual things of wickedness there. Nevertheless, we know they exist, because Peter spoke of them, when he said, “... **God did not spare [heavenly] agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...**” (Second Peter 2:4).

Our struggle is against all things of wickedness, including the spiritual ones in the heavenly things. Even though we cannot see those things, our faith and righteousness do contribute to their defeat. For one thing, we serve as examples of being faithful to God even when we suffer because of it. Therefore, nobody on earth or in heaven can use suffering as an excuse for their sins. For another thing, our resistance and opposition to the devil helps to weaken his evil influence here.

## Take up the full armor of God

- **Because of this 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** (Ephesians 6:13).

Paul said that by putting on the full armor of God we would be able to withstand in the evil day. The evil day Paul spoke about does not appear to refer to any particular day. It refers to any evil day when our souls are being attacked and threatened. That could happen when we face temptation, when we are persecuted, when our faith is challenged, when we become frustrated and discouraged. Having the full armor of God will enable us to withstand all such evils. And having done all, having lived to the end of our lives here on earth, we will be able to stand in the afterlife.

## The armor and the weapon

- **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 6:14-17).

Paul used armor to make an analogy with spiritual things. Armor is used for defense. It is designed to protect against attack. Paul listed five different kinds of armor, each of which was designed to protect a different part of the body. For his analogy Paul associated each

part of armor with a different characteristic of spiritual things. Below is a list of his comparisons:

Gird the loins with truth.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Shod the feet in preparation of the good news of peace.

Take up the shield of faith.

Take the helmet of salvation.

Spiritual truth is found in the scriptures of the Holy Bible, the word of God. And by surrounding ourselves with knowledge and understanding of that truth we strengthen our defenses against whatever evil day we may face. Therefore, careful and continuous study of the Bible is essential so that we can withstand any attack against our soul. Gird your loins with truth, surround yourself with knowledge and understanding of the word of God.

The next part of armor that Paul mentioned was the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is the application of knowledge and truth. Knowledge that is never applied is useless. It is the use of knowledge to create righteousness that brings the blessings. Paul compared righteousness to a breastplate.

As we should surround ourselves with truth, so we should protect our hearts with righteousness. For our souls are going to be judged in the last day by our works of righteousness. As John said in the book of Revelation, **“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).

Our feet are used for walking, and walking symbolizes living. Therefore, we should prepare our lives with the good news of peace, which is the good news of Christ. In order to live righteously in peace we need to prepare ourselves with the good news of Christ. We need to repent of our sins, and commit ourselves to follow in the steps of our Savior.

Paul also told us to take up the shield of faith. A shield is used to deflect attacking weapons. And Paul said that our shield of faith will quench all the fiery darts of evil. Fiery darts of evil symbolize everything that would threaten our eternal souls. And a list of those things would be virtually endless.

Faith means trusting God always, regardless of what happens. The Bible mentions Abraham as a great example of faith in God. He trusted God even when his faith was severely tested. No trial, tribulation, or temptation can threaten us if our faith is strong enough. Our trust is that God will ultimately reward the righteous with an eternal life of wonder and glory, and he will ultimately punish sinners with torment in the eternal fires of hell. That trust will keep us faithful to him against every challenge we face. It is when we doubt that we stumble.

Finally, Paul mentioned taking the helmet of salvation. A helmet is designed to protect the head. Our head contains the organ of our mind. And our mind is the only part of us that will survive the death of our flesh. Our mind is our conscious identity, and it survives in our divine spirit. And salvation means that God will give our spirit a new incorruptible body in heaven. That means our minds are preserved by salvation. Hence, salvation is our helmet.

Paul also mention one item used for offense: the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The word of God contains truth. And when truth is used it destroys both ignorance and deceit. Truth enlightens about God and his righteousness. It enlightens about the consequences of living. It reveals the promises and warnings of God. All those things destroy ignorance.

Moreover, the truth of the word of God destroys deceit by exposing it. Whenever deceit is used against us, the word of God destroys it. The word of God also destroys temptations by exposing how deadly they are. Remember how Jesus destroyed each of Satan's temptations in the wilderness by quoting from the word of God (see Matthew 4). Those passages struck down each temptation. For after each temptation Satan quit using it against Jesus when he quoted the word of God.

The word of God is a mighty sword. Therefore, train yourself to be skilled using that powerful sword of the Spirit.

## Praying for all the sanctified and for Paul

- **Praying through every prayer and entreaty at every time in spirit, and being alert in this same thing in all perseverance and entreaty for all the sanctified, and for me, so that utterance may be given to me in boldness in opening my mouth to make known the mystery of the good news, for which I am an ambassador in bondage, so that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:18-20).**

Prayers are when we speak to God. He only speaks to us from the words of the Holy Bible. He no longer speaks to men directly, as the following passage shows: **“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). God spoke to us in these last days by his Son. And the record of those words is only in the New Testament of the Bible.

Most prayers are entreaties, although some are prayers of gratitude and praise. But every prayer and entreaty should be in spirit. That means they should come from our spirit not from the motions of our thoughts or of our flesh. Simply mouthing prayers in some kind of ritual is not what God wants.

Paul also said we should be alert in this same thing in all perseverance and entreaty for all the sanctified, and for him. That means we should concentrate on what we say in prayer, with perseverance and pleas to God for all Christians everywhere.

However, our perseverance should not be with vain repetitions. Jesus condemned that kind of praying, when he said, **“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). Our perseverance in prayer should be from our spirit not with mechanical utterances.

Paul said the disciples at Ephesus were also to pray that way for him. He wanted them to pray that utterance would be given to him in boldness in opening his mouth to make know

the mystery of the good news. He wanted skill in his speech, and energy is his spirit so that he could effectively and powerfully proclaim the good news of Christ.

That good news had been a mystery to the world before it was proclaimed by Jesus. Who could have imagined it? It shows us what God is like; it unites all men in one kingdom; it teaches us how to overcome evil; it gives all men the opportunity to be resurrected from the dead (their divine spirits) and live in heaven as sons of God for eternity.

Paul told how he was an ambassador in bondage. He spoke about his ambassadorship when he wrote to the brothers at Corinth, saying, **“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).

There were many times when Paul was in bondage. However, here in his book to the Ephesians he was probably speaking about his many years of bondage by the Roman government, part of which is described in the last part of the book of Acts. Although he was in bondage, he was still able to proclaim the good news of salvation. He always found a way to proclaim it, even if it were only to his captors.

## Tychicus will inform you about us

- **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 is mentioned four other times in the Bible. Paul said he was a beloved brother and faithful helper of the Lord. We also know he was a messenger for Paul. We know that from the above passage as well as from the following ones:

**Tychicus will make known to you all things about me, the beloved brother and faithful helper and fellow bondman in the Lord** (Colossians 4:7).

**But Tychicus I sent to Ephesus** (Second Timothy 4:12).

**When I will send Artemas to thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me in Nicopolis, for I have decided to winter there** (Titus 3:12).

The only other thing we know about him is that he was an Asian (see Acts 20:4). Tychicus was an Asian in the Biblical sense, not an Oriental. Remember, the Asia mentioned in the Bible is now part of the modern country of Turkey.

Since Paul was in bondage, he needed to keep the congregations informed about himself. Whenever he was able Paul always had close personal relationships with those he converted. Remember what he said to them at Corinth: **“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”** (First Corinthians 4:14-15).

Therefore, he wanted them to be informed about him and those who were with him in that difficult time. He wanted to encourage them by knowing that he was still well. And he thought enough about them to send his beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord, Tychicus, to inform them about him.

## Peace and love is with all who have faith

- **Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** (Ephesians 6:23).

What Paul said in that passage is a fact, because every disciple receives (spiritual) peace and love from God and Christ. Peace is not to the wicked, because the scripture says, **“There is no peace, says Jehovah, to the wicked”** (Isaiah 48:22). Neither is love for them, because Jehovah takes it away. For example, Jehovah said about the Israelites when they became evil, **“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).

We receive peace and love from God and Christ with our faith. Our faith leads us to become disciples of Christ, members of the kingdom of God. And that makes us all spiritual brothers. Remember, the Bible commonly uses the word brothers in the generic sense, meaning both men and women, just as a brotherhood sometimes includes both men and women.

## Grace is with us

- **The grace is with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptibility. Truly** (Ephesians 6:24).

As the peace and love of God and Christ are with us, so also is God’s grace. His grace is with us if we love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptibility. Grace is favor and goodwill. And that is what we receive from God when we love his Son with incorruptibility.

That means our love for him must be pure and genuine. There can be no hypocrisy about it. Neither can we mix sin with it. For God’s love and grace for us is conditional, based upon our faithful obedience to him. The idea of God having unconditional love for us is a false teaching promoted by this most sinful generation of Americans.

# A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to the Philippians

## His greeting

- **Paul and Timothy, bondmen of Jesus Christ, to all the sanctified in Jesus Christ who are at Philippi, with the guardians and helpers: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1-2).**

This letter says it is from Paul and Timothy. However, there is no doubt that the words are those of the apostle Paul. Timothy, therefore, must have transcribed the letter for him, just as Tertius said he did for Paul's letter to the Romans: **"I Tertius, the man who transcribed the letter, salute you in the Lord"** (Romans 16:22). Paul probably had poor vision, which would have made it difficult for him to write.

The letter is addressed to all the sanctified in Christ at Philippi with the guardians and helpers. Every disciple of Christ has been sanctified by God. There is no separate class of disciples called saints. That idea is one of the many perversions of the Catholic Church.

The guardians and helpers are also called the elders and the deacons. The words guardian and helper are more descriptive labels for those offices. The elders of each congregation are guardians and overseers of that congregation. The deacons are helpers for them. Paul only mentioned those two offices because there are no others that are authorized. Offices such as Bishop are more Catholic perversions.

Paul said that grace and peace from God and Christ were to them, meaning all the sanctified in Christ at Philippi, including the guardians and helpers. Grace and peace from God and Christ are for every faithful disciple of Christ.

Paul referred to God as our Father and Jesus Christ as our Lord. He spoke that combination in every letter he wrote that we have in the New Testament. And he sometimes spoke it more than once in a letter. For he wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament, but those words are found over two dozen times in his writings.

## Paul thanks God for them

- **I thank my God upon every memory of you, always in my every entreaty for all of you, making the entreaty with joy for your participation in the good news from the first day until now (Philippians 1:3-5).**

Paul was thankful to God for them because of their participation in the good news of Christ. Paul had an intense love for the Lord, and he wanted us all to have love for him. Paul was joyful that the brothers at Philippi had believed in Christ and had become participants in his good news of our salvation.

Remember what Jesus said about sinners who repent: **"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"** (Luke 15:7). And just as there was joy in heaven

because those Philippians had repented and put on Christ, Paul too had joy because of them.

Therefore, he thanked his God whenever he remembered them. He thanked God always in his every entreaty for them all. Paul never neglected to pray for the congregations that he established. He was always concerned about their welfare. Remember, when he was describing all the persecutions, hardships, and other sufferings he had been enduring, he said, **“Besides the external things, crowding upon me daily is the care of all the congregations”** (Second Corinthians 11:28).

That is why he prayed for them, and also why he sent some of his helpers to them whenever he was able. Farther in this book he mentions sending Epaphroditus to them at Philippi.

## A good work in you

- **Being confident of this same thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus** (Philippians 1:6).

God began a good work in them when he added them to his church. For every faithful disciple of Christ performs and promotes truth and righteousness, which is indeed a good work. And just as Paul said that grace and peace from God and Christ were to them, so also he was confident that God would complete his good work in them until the day of Christ Jesus. Which time is

when this world is over  
when tolerance of rebellion against God ends  
when Christ reigns supreme over all things

That will be when his good work in us during our lives here will be complete. God will complete his good work in us because his Holy Spirit is in us and works with us, as long as we remain faithful to Christ.

## They are partners with him in the grace

- **Just as it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the good news, you all being partners with me of the grace. For God is my witness, how I long for you all in bowels of Jesus Christ** (Philippians 1:7-8).

Paul thanked God about them, and he was confident that God would complete the good work he began in them. He told them it was right for him to think that about all of them, because he had them in his heart. He obviously loved them greatly. And he reminded them they were partners with him of the grace, the grace that God gives us through Jesus Christ. Which grace is the promise that we will become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

Paul said he had them in his heart, both in his bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the good news. Being in bondage because of his labors for Christ did not diminish them in his heart. Paul was never resentful that he suffered for their sakes. For it was his evangelistic efforts that brought him suffering and bondage.

His defense of the good news was when he was teaching about it and showing how superior it is to any other way of life. His confirmation of the good news was probably when he was performing signs and wonders as evidence of its truth, that it really is from God, who alone has that power, and he alone can give it.

Paul also said he longed for them in bowels of Jesus Christ. As the heart symbolizes the deepest part of our minds, so the bowels symbolize our deepest feelings. Hence, Paul longed for them all in his deepest feelings of Christ. For remember how Paul said that we are the body of Christ upon the earth: “... **we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones**” (Ephesians 5:30).

### Examine the things that are significant

- **And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment for you to examine the things that are significant** (Philippians 1:9-10).

As Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians abounded still more and more, so our love should abound still more and more. And it should abound in knowledge and all discernment. That means our love should not be based only on an emotional feeling, but also on knowledge and all discernment. For blind love is virtually always misguided.

The Hollywood concept of falling in love is foolish. It is foolish because, as with everything else we do, our love should be guided by knowledge and discernment. When love is wise, then emotional feelings will follow. Blindly falling in love puts the cart before the horse. And that is why most marriages created that way fail.

Having our love for God abounding in knowledge and discernment enables us to examine the things that are significant. It prevents us from going astray after every wind of doctrine. Paul warned the Ephesian brothers against being “**childish, tossed about and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in craftiness with the methodology of error**” (Ephesians 4:14). We must all beware of that.

### Tested by sunlight

- **So that ye may be tested by sunlight and not stumbling toward the day of Christ, having been filled with fruits of righteousness, through Jesus Christ, for glory and praise of God** (Philippians 1:10-11).

When our love abounds more and more in knowledge and all discernment, then we can be tested by sunlight. Being tested by sunlight means being tested by that which is true and right. It means being examined to confirm the genuineness of how we should live. That way we can avoid stumbling toward the day of Christ. That way we can be confident of our eternal salvation.

And that way we can be filled with fruits of righteousness. What kinds of fruit of righteousness we bear will vary depending upon our individual circumstances. Nevertheless, having our love abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment enables us to be filled with fruits of righteousness, of whatever kind they may be.

Moreover, those fruits of righteousness will be through Jesus Christ, because we will be tested by sunlight and not stumbling toward the day of Christ. Being faithful disciples our fruits will always be through him. And when we do, then the world will see that the reason why we bear fruits of righteousness is because we belong to him. And that will be for glory and praise of God.

## His bonds have helped advance the good news

- **But I want you to know, brothers, that the things in respect to me have come more for the advancement of the good news, in order for my bonds in Christ to become apparent in the whole Praetorium, and in all the others. And more of the brothers in the Lord have been convinced by my bonds to be much more bold to speak the word fearlessly (Philippians 1:12-14).**

Paul mentions being in bondage in a Praetorium, which was a Roman fortress. Remember, Jesus was tried before Pilate in the Praetorium in Jerusalem. His brothers at Philippi were no doubt concerned about his bondage. But he assured them that the things that happened to him, including his bondage, came more for the advancement of the good news instead of its detriment. Paul's primary concern was not the effects of his bondage on himself, but on the good news of Christ. And he was pleased to report the effect was to advance the good news.

He told how the things that happened to him enabled his bondage in Christ to become apparent in the whole Praetorium, and in all the others. Paul was not seen as a common criminal. He was imprisoned for promoting the good news of Christ. And that may have aroused the interest of the whole Praetorium, which probably included the prisoners as well as the guards. And that advanced the good news by spreading awareness of it.

Paul also said it became apparent "in all the others." That suggests knowledge about him and the reasons for his bondage spread out from the Praetorium. In those days the news of interesting events was spread mostly by word of mouth. Paul also mentioned how his bonds convinced more of the brothers in the Lord **"to be much more bold to speak the word fearlessly."** Their knowledge of Paul's courage, and the positive effects that resulted from his bondage were convincing to them. Those things encouraged them to be much more bold to speak the word of the good news of Christ fearlessly.

That report was no doubt very encouraging to the brothers at Philippi. And our knowledge of it should help us to be much more bold to speak the word fearlessly. For we all face persecutions because of our faith in Christ. And Paul's example is encouragement for us not to be defeated by persecutions, but to endure them because they too will somehow advance the good news of our salvation.

## Some preach in pretence, others in truth

- **Actually some even preach the Christ because of envy and strife, and some also because of good-will. Some indeed proclaim the Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to bring affliction to my bonds. But some**

**from love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the good news**  
(Philippians 1:15-17).

In every generation there are going to be men who preach Christ hypocritically. Their motives are not upright; they preach from evil motives. In Paul's situation such men preached Christ because of envy and strife, from selfish ambition and not sincerely. They even wanted to bring affliction to his bonds.

They were what Paul called false brothers, and they were full of envy of him. Paul wrote more about such men in his second letter to the Corinthians. He called them "superlative apostles" sarcastically because they puffed themselves up over him.

Nevertheless, there were other men who preached Christ because of love and good-will. They loved Paul because they knew he was set for the defense of the good news. They knew he had sacrificed his life to promote Christ.

### In any case Christ is proclaimed

- **What then? Except in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice, but also I will rejoice** (Philippians 1:18).

Paul had such an indomitable spirit that he even rejoiced when he was being persecuted by those false brothers. He rejoiced not because of their persecution, but because they were proclaiming Christ, even though they were proclaiming him from envy and strife, from selfish ambition and insincerity.

Therefore, we too should rejoice when Christ is proclaimed, whether in pretense or in truth. As long as men proclaim the genuine good news of Christ, God will judge their hearts. We cannot judge the hearts of men, but we can judge their deeds. Paul was able to judge those men because he was divinely guided by the Holy Spirit. However, we can only judge by the fruits that men produce, meaning the kind of lives they live and the consequences of their actions.

### Paul anticipated his salvation

- **For I know that this will turn out to me for salvation (through your entreaty, and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ) according to my eager expectation and hope that I will be shamed in nothing** (Philippians 1:19-20).

Paul's bondage could have resulted in his release or in his death. The Bible record does not tell us which it was. Nevertheless, he had the expectation that if he was not saved from bondage and death, he would be saved to live in heaven with Christ. Either way it would turn out to him for salvation.

It would turn out that way through their entreaty for him, and the support of the Spirit of Christ. If he was saved from his bondage that would be a result of their entreaty. His salvation in heaven would be from the support of the Spirit of Christ. Either way it would turn out to him for salvation.

Paul had the eager expectation and hope that he would be shamed in nothing. He would not be shamed, because he was an innocent man remaining faithful in his service to Christ.

## Christ magnified in his body

- **But with all boldness, now as always, Christ will also be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death** (Philippians 1:20).

Paul would never stop being bold in his efforts to promote Christ and his good news of our salvation. He knew that Christ would be magnified in his body whether he lived or died. Christ was certainly magnified among the Gentiles by the ceaseless efforts of Paul. And everyone knows how Christ has been magnified after the death of Paul. For much of the New Testament record consists of his writings. And those writings continue to magnify Christ and his good news.

## Being with Christ or remaining

- **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in flesh, this is fruit of labor to me, then what I will choose I know not. And I am constrained by the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, being far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary because of you** (Philippians 1:21-24).

What Paul said about living and dying is true of us all. For us to live is Christ, because **“we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30). And as with Paul, to live in flesh is fruit of labor for us. It is because, while we live here upon the earth, we can promote Christ’s good news of salvation and strive to save souls. We can bear fruit by converting the lost; we can bear fruit by our example to the world; we can bear fruit in our teaching of the good news; we can bear fruit for him by whatever we do that is good, right, and just.

And also for us, as with Paul, to die is gain. It is gain because we have the promise of eternal sonship with God in heaven, where there is no sorrow and death. It is a world of righteousness, as Peter said: **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13).

Paul was constrained by the two. He said he wanted to be in heaven with Christ, which was **“being far better.”** But he also said to remain in the flesh was more necessary because of them. He wanted to continue bearing fruit of labor here upon the earth. And that indicates he had a choice between departing to be with Christ or remaining because of them. God must have given Paul that choice, at least at that time. We are not given the choice of when to die. However, like Moses, Paul had a wonderful and very special relationship with Christ because he was such a worthy man.

Another example of that is how Paul received his knowledge 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).

## Remaining for their benefit

- **And having been convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and will continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. So that your pride may abound in Christ Jesus in me because of my presence with you again (Philippians 1:25-26).**

Being convinced that remaining was beneficial to them, Paul said he knew he would remain, and would continue with them all. He would remain and continue with them all, not because it would be better for him, but because it would be better for them, for their progress and joy in the faith.

Remember, the New Testament had not yet been written, and Paul was an apostle of Christ who was able to teach them accurately about the good news. And acquiring that knowledge would cause them to progress in the faith. And that would add to their joy in the faith. For obtaining knowledge is like giving us light in the darkness. And who would not have joy when he was given light as he was groping in the darkness? The good news gives joy to every man who loves truth and righteousness.

Paul said his presence again with them would cause their pride in Christ in him to abound. While Paul was with them they could see that the Spirit of Christ was in him. And that would increase their pride in Christ Jesus. Paul could not only teach them the good news of Christ, but he could also demonstrate to them the effects of the Spirit of Christ in him. Thus, their pride would abound, not in Paul, but in Christ. Their pride could abound that way because they could see the effects of Christ that were manifested in Paul.

## Be citizens worthy of the good news

- **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 (Philippians 1:27).**

As faithful disciples of Christ we are citizens of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the heavens. And when this world is over, we will be citizens in the new Jerusalem of the new heavens and earth. And since that is such a fabulous privilege, then we should strive to be worthy citizens. And that includes standing firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the good news.

Paul wanted them (1) to stand firm in one spirit, with one soul, and (2) to strive together for the faith of the good news. Remember, during the time of the last supper Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples, that they be one, one in spirit: **“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).

Jesus said our unity would enable the world to know that God sent him and loved them, just as God loved him. Paul also said they should stand firm in one spirit. There are many reasons why there is so much division among believers in Christ. One of which is the lack of resolve to stand firm in one spirit. Paul hoped to hear that the disciples were standing firm in one spirit.

Paul also said their unity should be used to strive together for the faith of the good news. An old proverb says, “There is strength in unity.” Those words are not in the Bible, but the truth of them certainly is. For example, Solomon said about the value of unity, **“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and has not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth, but how can one be warm alone? And if a man prevails against him who is alone, two shall withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken”** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Our unity should be used, not just for our benefit, but to help us strive for the faith of the good news. As Jesus said, our oneness would enable the world to know that God sent him and loves us just as God loved him. The world is impressed with any kind of unity, but the unity of truth and righteousness is the most impressive, even though they hate us.

## Be not frightened in anything

- **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. Because to you it was granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, having the same conflict such as ye saw in me, and now hear is in me** (Philippians 1:28-30).

Our fearlessness in the face of opposition is both a sign of destruction to those who oppose us, and a sign to us of our salvation from God. It is a sign of destruction to them because it reveals the depth of our faith and our resolve. And even if they have the same fearlessness they will not be able to stand against us because God is with us. When our fearlessness fails then we fail. And I regret to say, that is becoming more characteristic of this generation of believers.

Our fearlessness in the face of opposition is also a sign to us of our salvation from God. For there will be no salvation without it. Remember what the book of Revelation says about cowards: **“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.

Paul said it was actually an honor to suffer for Christ. He said it has been granted to us on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him. He is allowing us to suffer with him. He is allowing us to experience the same kinds of rejection and persecution that he experienced. Paul told them it was granted for them to have the same conflict

they saw in him and heard was still in him. And that conflict was with those who oppose the good news of Christ.

From the Bible record we can read about many of the conflicts Paul endured with the enemies of Christ. And as faithful believers it has been granted on behalf of Christ for us to not only believe, but also to suffer for him, having the same conflict Paul endured.

Although we suffer for him, in another letter Paul said we would also be rewarded with him: **“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).

## How you all should be

- **If therefore any exhortation is in Christ, if any encouragement of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill my joy, that ye may think the same way, having the same love, being knit in soul, thinking in oneness, in nothing according to selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility considering each other surpassing yourselves** (Philippians 2:1-3).

In that passage Paul asked about four kinds of virtue:

if any exhortation is in Christ  
 if any encouragement of love  
 if any fellowship of spirit  
 if any bowels and mercies

An exhortation in Christ means urging to live in him and for him. An encouragement of love means to give confidence and support with love and for love. A fellowship of spirit means having mutual activity and sharing. And bowels and mercies refer to our deepest feelings and compassions for him and for each other.

Paul asked if there were any of those things, then they should fulfill his joy, that they may

think the same way  
 have the same love  
 be knit in soul  
 think in oneness  
 in nothing according to selfish ambition or empty conceit  
 in humility considering each other surpassing yourselves

Paul urged thinking the same way in his letters to the Romans and to the Corinthians (see Romans 15:15 and Second Corinthians 13:11). Three times in this letter he urged the Philippians to think the same way. Thinking the same way does not mean regimented thinking. It means having the same world-view, and having a common understanding of the will of God for us. It also means having the same core values about God and about life.

Having the same love means obeying the two great commandments. Remember, when a lawyer asked Jesus about the great commandment of the law, he 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. And the second is like it, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself”** (Matthew 22:37-39).

Having the same love also means having the same love for each other as disciples of Christ in his church. For Jesus said to his disciples at 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”** (John 13:34).

An example of being knit in soul is that of Jonathan with David. Jonathan was the son of king Saul, and the scriptures say this about him after David killed Goliath the Philistine enemy soldier: **“And it came to pass, when he [David] had made an end of speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul”** (First Samuel 18:1). Being knit in soul means loving each other as our own soul.

Thinking in oneness is similar to thinking the same way. Thinking in oneness is being undivided in our thinking, undivided in the sense of having no conflicts or discord. We can think in oneness that way and still have some differences in our thinking. For example, within myself I sometimes have differences in my thoughts, which sometimes compete with each other. Yet my mind is still whole, and my overall thinking is in oneness. Remember how Paul told of the debate he had within himself about remaining in the flesh for fruit of labor to him or departing to be with Christ?

Paul also said we should do nothing according to selfish ambition or empty conceit. James told of the evil consequences of selfish ambition, when he said, **“For where envy and selfish ambition are, there is instability and every evil deed”** (James 3:16). Envy commonly accompanies selfish ambition.

Conceit is an attitude a man has about himself that he is more than he is. He exalts himself in his own eyes. All conceit is a kind of emptiness. A conceited man puffs himself up with emptiness, having no substance. He tries to make himself look much bigger than he really is. Such a man is a fool because he is setting himself up for a fall. As Solomon said, **“Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18).

In contrast to selfish ambition and empty conceit, Paul said we should have humility considering each other surpassing ourselves. Humility is a recognition about ourselves that is accurate. It is neither overblown nor underestimated. Thinking too little of ourselves is no better than thinking too much.

Paul is an example of a man with realistic thinking that kept him humble, but still an effective worker for Christ. He spoke of his genuine strengths, but he admitted his weaknesses. Nevertheless remember, realistic thinking about ourselves must be done with the high standards of God, not those of men. Comparing ourselves with the high standards of God should be enough to keep us all humble.

Considering each other surpassing ourselves obviously does not mean each disciple surpasses every other disciple. It means recognizing that collectively we surpass any one of us. No one disciple should ever be considered surpassing all the others. And each of us should always keep that in mind, because there is always the temptation to elevate someone too high above us, especially a man who is both charismatic and talented. Cults of personality often result from thinking too highly of a man. Jesus condemned all such things.

## Look also to the things of others

- **Look ye out (each man) not to things of yourselves, but each man also to the things of others. Indeed have this way to think in you, that also was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).**

What Paul says is that we should not look out *only* to the things of ourselves. Each one of us should also look to the things of others. That means we should be sensitive to the needs and troubles of each other. However, it does not mean meddling. Good judgment and discretion should always be used when looking out to things of others. It is best to allow each man to manage his own life, while keeping a watchful eye that all things are well with him. Looking out to the things of others means we as a congregation of disciples should stand ready to help when we are needed.

We should be humble and concerned about each other because that was the way Christ himself thought. All four of his biographies provide ample evidence of that way of thinking in him.

## Christ emptied himself, becoming like a man

- **Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God something to seize. 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 2:6-8).**

That passage is often used as evidence that Christ was completely equal with God. But it does not say that at all. It says he did not consider being equal to God something to seize. He never tried to seize equality with God. It was not even something he considered. Satan is the one who has been trying to seize being equal with God. Indeed, he wants to supplant him, and he has succeeded with most of the world.

Instead of wanting to be equal to God, Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a bondman. He took the form of a bondman when he became in a likeness of men. Christ emptied himself when his Spirit departed from his glorious body in heaven, and entered into a body of flesh being born as a man.

And as his consciousness developed in that infant body, realizing that he was in that form, he lowered himself. He humbly accepted that lower form, and became obedient until death. When his infant body matured enough for him to be able to exercise his free will, he obeyed the will of God for him until his death. And God's will for him was that he would even die upon a cross.

Christ is a perfect example of being humble. He is a perfect example of obeying God completely even until death. He is a perfect example of enduring suffering without complaint in order to be obedient. He is a perfect example to us of everything that is good and right and just. Hence, we should carefully and continuously study the record of his life and his teachings, which are found only in the New Testament of the Bible

## Therefore God highly exalted him

- **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).

Because Jesus emptied himself, took the form of a bondman becoming in the likeness of men, and lowered himself in obedience, even of death from a cross, then God highly exalted him. And he gave him the name that is above every name. Remember, a name is an identity. Therefore, God gave Jesus an identity that is above every identity.

And having that name, that identity, meant every knee should bow to him. They should bow because God highly exalted Jesus over them. God exalted him above everyone—everyone in heaven, everyone on the earth, and everyone in the sub-earthly. The sub-earthly probably refers to the souls in places like hell. Peter spoke of heavenly agents in hell: **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4).

The sub-earthly may also refer to Hades, which is the name for the place of the dead. Peter told how Jesus was not left behind in Hades after his crucifixion: **“Having foreseen this, he [David] spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that his soul was not left behind in Hades, nor did his flesh see decay”** (Acts 2:31).

Hades may also be a kind of spiritual prison like hell, because in another place Peter told how after Jesus was crucified, he preached to the dead of the antediluvian world: **“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).

Apparently everyone lives in one of those three levels of existence, because the passage says that everyone from them will bow their knee at the name of Jesus. That means even those who hated and cursed him here upon the earth will bow their knee to him. They will be forced to bow, because they will no longer have any freedom.

The passage also says that every tongue will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. Even those who hated and cursed him here upon the earth will acknowledge that he is Lord. They will be force to acknowledge him because they will no longer have any freedom.

The Bible says that all unrepentant sinners will have no freedom because they will be ruled with a rod of iron. For example, a passage from Revelation says, **“And the armies in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, pure white. And a sharp two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, so that he would smite the nations by it. And he will tend them with a rod of iron.**

**“And he treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God. And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”** (Revelation 19:14-16).

Paul also said that everybody bowing and acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord will be to the glory of God the Father. It will be to the glory of God because Jesus is subordinate to God. Jesus Christ is Lord over everyone, and God is head of Christ.

## Work out your own salvation with fear

- **Therefore my beloved, just as ye have always obeyed, not only as in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to desire and to work for approval** (Philippians 2:12-13).

Paul called the disciples at Philippi his beloved. He had great love for all of the congregations. They were his joy and crown. In the next passage of this book he says they were as lights shining in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation.

And he complimented them for their obedience. However, he said that in his absence they should now much more work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. And we too, without the personal guidance of the apostles, should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. They have left us their testimony in the New Testament, which is sufficient for us now.

Working out our own salvation means applying the will of God to our individual lives. It means applying his will to whatever particular circumstances exist for a disciple. Each one of us is unique in some way, and our lives are unique in some things. Therefore, we must work out our salvation according to our individual circumstances.

However, how we work out our own salvation must be within the standards and requirements of the good news of Christ. For we cannot work out our own salvation outside of obedience to him. No man can work out his salvation his own way independent of Christ. As 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).

Regarding the words fear and trembling, they mean having the highest level of care and caution. A common example of doing something with fear and trembling is driving a vehicle on a busy highway. As with most Americans I have spent thousands of hours driving on busy highways. Most of the time I am relaxed and comfortable while I drive. I do not dread the experience; instead, I usually enjoy it. Nevertheless, I always try to be alert and cautious, because there is always in my mind fear and trembling knowing the horrible consequences of being nonchalant and careless about it. I know my life and the lives of others around me are at stake.

And in the same way we can enjoy knowing God, and we can rejoice in the hope we have through Christ. But we must always keep that hope secure by working out our own salvation with fear and trembling knowing the horrible consequences of being nonchalant and careless about it. Our eternal souls are at stake.

Paul also said it is God who works in us both for desire and to work for approval. As disciples of Christ the Holy Spirit is in us, influencing us to desire his approval, and helping us

work for that approval. For it takes more than just the desire for God's approval. We must work for it, and work with fear and trembling.

Remember, God's Holy Spirit works in us through our knowledge of the will of God (from the Bible) and in the enlightened feelings of our conscience. And that unseen force within us helps us both desire God's approval and to work for it.

## Become blameless and pure

- **Do all things without grumbings and arguments, so that ye may become blameless and pure children of God, blameless in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world** (Philippians 2:14-15).

Grumbling is a normal part of the lives of sinners. Everyone suffers trials, tribulation, and other kinds of stresses in life. Sinners grumble and complain about them, which simply adds to the stresses of those around them. As children of God we are to subdue the urge to grumble and complain. Our knowledge about God and his good news for us makes that much easier. For example, **"... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose"** (Romans 8:28). Sinners have no such comforting thoughts.

Arguing is also a normal part of the lives of sinners. We all have conflicts and quarrels with other people about various things at various times. Sinners argue, sometimes shouting and fighting along with it, depending upon the intensity of the conflict. As children of God we are to avoid such things. It is right and good to reason and debate about some disagreement, but not to argue. Arguments are controlled more by emotions than by reason. Arguing is fighting with words.

Remember this example of the Jews quarreling among themselves when they were accusing Paul at Caesarea: **"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.**

**"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 23:6-10).

We as children of God, in contrast with the grumbings and arguments of sinners, patiently endure and keep the hope we have for the better life. That way we keep ourselves blameless and pure in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. Although humble and lowly, we shine as lights in the world. We demonstrate to the world the superior way that God wants us to live.

When Paul spoke of a crooked and perverted generation he was referring to the people of this world, not the particular generation of that time. The world is crooked and perverted because they take the good things that God has given us and distort and pervert them, misuse and abuse them. Just look at the mess they have made of marriage. Just look at how they have corrupted society. Just look at how much injustice they create. Just look at how they indulge their lusts with things like drunkenness and fornication, and the adverse consequences of them.

## Hold firm the word of life

- **Holding firm the word of life, for a boast by me in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain. Yet even if I am poured out a libation upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. And in the same way, ye also be glad and rejoice with me** (Philippians 2:16-18).

The word of life is the word of God, which is found only in the Holy Bible. Living our lives by what it teaches is the only way to keep our souls secure with God so that we may have eternal life.

Paul had devoted his life to teaching and promoting the word of life. And those disciples were part of the fruits of that labor. In the day of Christ—the great judgment day and the afterlife—Paul could be proud of his contribution to their salvation. However, that could only happen if they held firm the word of life, if they kept living righteously according to its teachings. Otherwise, they would be lost and Paul could not take pride in them. He would have run in vain and labored in vain about them.

In his zeal to promote the word of life, Paul was ready to be poured out a libation upon the sacrifice and service of their faith. Indeed, he would be glad and rejoice with them, with the hope of their salvation. Pouring out a libation was part of the ritual of the animal sacrifices commanded by the law of Moses. The blood of the animal was the libation. Here is only one example: **“And he shall bring the bullock to the door of the tent of meeting before Jehovah. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the bullock, and kill the bullock before Jehovah.**

**“And the anointed priest shall take of the blood of the bullock, and bring it to the tent of meeting. And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before Jehovah, before the veil of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before Jehovah, which is in the tent of meeting, and all the blood of the bullock he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the door of the tent of meeting”** (Leviticus 4:4-7).

Paul being poured out a libation meant losing his life in sacrifice for their sake. Remember, Paul spoke earlier about being in bonds. He was in bonds because of his labors promoting the word of life. And it was possible he could lose his life. Nevertheless, if Paul were sentenced to death, he would still be glad and rejoice because of them. They were fruits of his labors there. Therefore, he encouraged them to be glad and rejoice with him.

They could certainly grieve if he were to perish, but they could still be glad and rejoice in the hope they all had for a better life in heaven.

## Paul hopes to send Timothy first

- **But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I also may be cheerful when I know the things about you** (Philippians 2:19).

We all enjoy learning things about our loved ones when we are away from them. Letters have been used since ancient times that way. However, personal reports from others are the best way. This book is a letter Paul sent to the congregation at Philippi. And perhaps he sometimes received letters from them. However, it was best for him to send someone to get a firsthand report. And that way Paul could be cheerful when he received that report about them.

Notice how Paul said he hoped in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy soon. That suggests Paul had been praying to the Lord that he could send Timothy to get a report about them. That also suggests there were perhaps obstacles that were making it difficult either for Paul to send him or for Timothy's ability to go. We need to remember that journeys in those days were more difficult. And they often entailed considerable expense because of the time spent. Hence, Paul hoped in the Lord Jesus to send him.

## In praise of Timothy

- **For I have no man like-minded who will genuinely care for the things about you. For they all seek the things of themselves, not the things of Christ Jesus. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child to a father, he served with me for the good news** (Philippians 2:20-22).

The words about having no man like-minded who would genuinely care for the things about them, must have applied to those who were available to Paul at the time. Saying that they all sought the things of themselves, not the things of Christ Jesus, suggests the other men around him were those who were not preaching Christ sincerely. Remember, he spoke about such men earlier. For in the past many men had helped Paul, men such as Titus who were unselfish and zealous to promote the good news of Christ, but they were obviously not available.

However, Timothy was with him. Paul had many good co-workmen, but Timothy had a special relationship with him. Paul said that Timothy served with him for the good news like a child does to a father. And there are not many men who serve another man that way. Moreover, Timothy was like-minded with Paul. That means Timothy had the same thoughts and feelings that Paul had about the congregations, genuinely caring for the things about them.

## Hoping to send him immediately

- **Indeed therefore I hope to send this man immediately, whenever I may focus on the things concerning me. And I trust in the Lord that I myself also will come soon** (Philippians 2:23-24).

Paul wanted to send Timothy immediately. However, the above passage indicates that Paul was too occupied with some other affairs to make proper preparation for Timothy. He was focused on things not concerning him personally, whatever those things were. Nevertheless, he hoped to send Timothy immediately, meaning as soon as he was able.

Paul also said he trusted in the Lord that he himself would come soon. However, what that means is not clear. For remember, one reason he was sending Timothy was to know the things about them. That means he expected Timothy to return with a report about them. Therefore, by coming to them soon probably meant he would come soon after Timothy's return with his report.

Paul had already said that he *hoped* in the Lord to send Timothy to them soon. In the above passage Paul says he *trusted* in the Lord that he himself would also come soon. I can see no difference in his hoping and trusting in the Lord. For hoping in the Lord means trusting him. And trusting in the Lord means hoping in him. In the Lord our hope and trust always go together.

## Epaphroditus

- **But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and co-workman and fellow soldier, and your messenger and servant of my need, since he was longing for you all, and distressed because ye heard that he was sick. For also he was sick, near death, but God was merciful to him, and not only him, but also me, so that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow** (Philippians 2:25-27).

Epaphroditus is only mentioned here in this letter to the Philippians. Paul said Epaphroditus was

- his brother
- his co-workman
- a fellow soldier
- their messenger
- a servant of his need

Epaphroditus was a spiritual brother of Paul in the brotherhood of Christ, and a co-workman with him.

Paul also said Epaphroditus was a fellow soldier. As disciples of Christ, we are all soldiers in the great spiritual warfare between God and the devil. Paul spoke of that warfare in his letter to the Corinthians: **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience**

**of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled”** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

And remember what Jesus said about our warfare: **“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). As long as we are upon this earth we his disciples are all soldiers of Christ fighting for him in his great spiritual warfare.

Epaphroditus was also their messenger sent by Paul to communicate personally with them. He probably brought this letter when he came to them. Paul also called him a servant of his need. Paul had many needs, but Epaphroditus probably served him in his need to care for the many congregations that Paul established. That care required Paul both to know how the congregations were doing, and also to be able to inform and instruct them as necessary. Remember, Paul said earlier he was also hoping in the Lord to send Timothy to them, to both **“care for the things about [them]”**, and that he might **“be cheerful when [he knew] the things about [them].”**

Like Timothy, Epaphroditus was also a man who genuinely cared about them. For Paul said that Epaphroditus was longing for them all. How could he long for them if he did not care for them?

Epaphroditus was also distressed because they heard that he was sick. That clearly indicates that the congregation at Philippi had great love for Epaphroditus. Otherwise why would they be distressed at the knowledge he was sick? Epaphroditus knew of their love for him. Consequently, he wanted to relieve their distress about him with his visit. Which relief would have brought them joy.

Such love for Epaphroditus indicates they knew him personally and had established a strong emotional attachment with him. That could only have happened if he had spent time with them. And that suggests he had worked with Paul while Paul was at Philippi creating or building up the congregation there. Actually, Epaphroditus may even have been a native of Philippi, but we know nothing more about him than what is said in this book.

The knowledge the Philippians had about Epaphroditus being sick was accurate but not up to date. As Paul said, he was sick, near death, but God was merciful to him. That means Epaphroditus had recovered from whatever sickness he had and was now healthy.

Paul also told how God’s mercy to Epaphroditus was also mercy to him. For the death of Epaphroditus would have brought him **“sorrow upon sorrow.”** Remember, Paul was in bondage with the possibility of the death sentence. And who knows what other sorrows he was experiencing? Paul’s life as an apostle of Christ was filled with sorrows.

Remember what the Lord said to Ananias when he told him to go to Paul after Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus: **“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).

## Sending Epaphroditus

- **Therefore I sent him more urgently, so that having seen him again, ye may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful** (Philippians 2:28).

Paul sent Epaphroditus more urgently so that they may rejoice, and that would make Paul less sorrowful. That means Paul was sorrowful because they were distressed about the sickness of Epaphroditus. Notice how interrelated were the feelings of Paul, Epaphroditus, and the disciples at Philippi. When one was sorrowful, they were all sorrowful. And when one rejoiced they all rejoiced.

That is the kind of oneness that Jesus wants us all to have with each other. A oneness in our feelings as well as a oneness in our knowledge of the will of God for us, and in our obedience to his will. As Paul said to the brothers at Rome, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ...”** (Romans 12:15). For **“we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

## Hold such men esteemed

- **Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men esteemed. Because for sake of the work of the Christ he came near the point of death, handing over his life so that he might fill up the deficiency of your service toward me** (Philippians 2:29-30).

When Paul told them to receive Epaphroditus in the Lord with all gladness, he was probably telling them to stop worrying about him, and instead rejoice because God had shown him such mercy. He also commanded them to hold such men in esteem. Not every disciple deserves being held in (special) esteem by us. Epaphroditus deserved being held in esteem because of what he did for the work of the Christ.

For the work of the Christ, Epaphroditus came near the point of death, handing over his life. That indicates the illness of Epaphroditus was caused by his work of the Christ. Remember, Paul said Epaphroditus was near death in his illness. His illness was probably caused by persecution resulting from his labor promoting the good news of Christ.

Paul said that Epaphroditus handed over his life. That means he knew he was risking his life, but he continued doing the work of Christ anyway. No details are given about his illness, but it may have been caused by severe injuries inflicted upon him. No details are given because they are irrelevant to us. All we need to know is that he handed over his life for the sake of the work of the Christ. And we need to esteem such men, and follow in their steps, being willing to hand over our lives for the work of the Christ, if that be the will of God for us.

Paul said that Epaphroditus willingly handed over his life so that he might fill up the deficiency of their service toward him. No details are given about what that was either. Therefore, we can only conjecture. The congregations served Paul primarily in two ways. They gave him financial support and they gave men to work with him. Congregations that gave him nothing were deficient in their service to him. For remember what Paul said to the

Galatians: **“But let him who is taught in the word share in all good things with him who teaches”** (Galatians 6:6).

## Rejoice in the Lord

- **Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord** (Philippians 3:1).

Three times in this letter Paul told them to rejoice in the Lord. Farther in this book he even emphasized rejoicing in the Lord, telling them to rejoice in the Lord always: **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”** (Philippians 4:4). Our spirit should rejoice in the Lord always even when we are suffering. We should always rejoice in our spirits because of the great hope we have in him. Our flesh may groan in our labors, and in our trials and tribulations, but our spirit should always rejoice in the Lord.

Remember what Paul said to the disciples at Rome: **“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). Knowing such things helps us to rejoice in the Lord regardless of what happens to us in this life.

## Writing the same things to them

- **To write the same things to you is really not irksome to me, but safe for you** (Philippians 3:1).

We only have record of this one letter that Paul sent to the Philippians. However, that passage indicates he had written to them more than once. It also says he had written the same things to them. One of the most fundamental principles of learning is repetition. What righteous mother does not often repeat the things that her children need to learn?

The Bible itself is filled with writings about the same kinds of things. As Paul said, frequent reminders are safe for us. They are safe for us because they keep those things fresh in our memories. And that helps us live right in the sight of God.

Peter also wrote about reminding us about the word of God: **“Therefore I will not neglect to always remind you about these things, although having known them, and having been established in the present truth. 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”** (Second Peter 1:12-14).

## Beware

- **Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workmen, beware of the excision. For we are the circumcision, men who worship in spirit to God, and who boast in Christ Jesus, and not being confident in flesh** (Philippians 3:2-3).

Three times in those first words Paul warns about the Jews who were opposed to Christ. He called them dogs, evil workmen, and the excision. The New Testament record clearly shows how the Jews were the most vicious enemies of Christ and his church.

Regarding Paul's application of the word dogs, in the Bible dogs symbolize the most wretched class of men. Here is an Old Testament prophecy of Jesus about his crucifixion: **"For dogs have encompassed me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet"** (Psalm 22:16). Those dogs were the wretched men who reviled him, cursed him, and condemned him to be crucified.

Evil workmen are those of every class who do evil and wickedness. Paul also called the Jews who persecuted the apostles and the church the excision because they were circumcised. They were circumcised in the flesh, but not in the spirit. For Paul said we are the circumcision, which means we are now God's people. Remember, circumcision was commanded of the Hebrews as a mark of belonging to God. However, physical circumcision no longer matters to him.

Remember what Paul said about being a real Jew: **"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).

We worship God in spirit not in mere ceremonies. We boast in Christ Jesus, because he redeemed us from our sins. And we put no confidence in flesh, such as circumcision. Our confidence is in Christ and the unsurpassed hope that he gave us.

### Paul's greater confidence in flesh

- **Although (I having confidence also in flesh) if any other man seems to be confident in the flesh, I more: in circumcision the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; regarding law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness in law, having become blameless** (Philippians 3:4-6).

Paul put no confidence in the flesh, because he trusted Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he had more qualifications for confidence in flesh than any other man. Thus, no man could criticize him for condemning confidence in the flesh. No man could criticize him, because he was better qualified by worldly (fleshly) standards than any other man.

And to prove that claim he listed his qualifications. Paul said he was,

in circumcision the eighth day  
of the race of Israel  
of the tribe of Benjamin  
a Hebrew of Hebrews  
regarding law, a Pharisee  
regarding zeal, persecuting the church  
regarding the righteousness in law, having become blameless

The law of Moses required every male child be circumcised the eighth day after birth. Paul was of Israel, the chosen race of God. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, he was of the tribe of

Benjamin. Abraham was the founding father of the Hebrews. And Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews. That means he was a pure blood Hebrew. Even David was not a pure blood Hebrew, because one of his ancestors was Ruth the Moabite.

Regarding law, Paul was a Pharisee, which was the strictest sect of the Jews. Paul proved his zeal for God by actively persecuting the church (in his ignorance). Regarding the righteousness in law, Paul had become blameless. That means he had reached the point where he kept every one of them. For no man is completely blameless before God.

Thus, no man could claim to be better qualified before God in the flesh than Paul was. Yet he condemned having confidence in the flesh. He condemned it because our only hope is faith and obedience to Jesus Christ, not our successes in the world.

## Counting all things loss

- **But whatever was gain to me, these things I regarded loss because of the Christ. But indeed therefore I even consider all things to be loss because of things surpassing, of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I suffered the loss of all things, and consider them to be rubbish** (Philippians 3:7-8).

Paul forsook all confidence in those qualifications and regarded them loss because of the Christ. He could have risen high among the Jews of that generation. But he forsook everything for things that are much better, things that surpass the glories of this world. Which things are the knowledge of Christ our Lord.

Knowledge of Jesus Christ surpasses all things in this world because it is by knowing him and his message of good news for us that we can learn about God, learn about God's will for us, and learn about the great hope we have to become his Sons for eternity. Knowledge of Christ is like a great shining light to our spirits in this dark sinful world.

Therefore, Paul said it was because of Christ that he suffered the loss of all things, all things of this world, and considered them to be rubbish. For compared with the glories of eternal life in heaven with God, the greatest glories of this world are truly rubbish. Indeed, they literally become rubbish because everything in this world eventually decays.

Consider the greatest treasures of the ancient world, which archaeologists sometimes discover. They have no real value except as collector's items. Not one of them has any practical value. And who would be happy living with the treasures of a mere century ago—the clothing, the cars, the houses? **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

All is vanity in this world because God made it that way, as Paul said to the Romans: **“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”** (Romans 8:20-21). He made it that way so we would set our hope on things in heaven not in this world. When the Bible says, **“And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good”** (Genesis 1:31), that means it was very good for the purposes he made it.

## To gain Christ

- **So that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having my righteousness, that from law, but that through Christ's faith—the righteousness from God based on faith—to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the participation of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if somehow I might attain to the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:8-11).**

Paul suffered the loss of all things so that he might gain Christ. Remember what Jesus said about losing your life because of him: “... **he who loses his life because of me will find it**” (Matthew 10:39). Paul suffered the loss of all things and found it in Christ. He gained Christ and was found in him.

His righteousness was not according to a legal system, but through Christ's faith. The faith of Christ is more than just believing in God, it is complete trust in God. And Jesus proved by his life that he had complete trust in his heavenly Father, even when it was sorely tested. Consequently, he live a completely sinless life. Therefore, God exalted him above all things.

The righteousness from God is having such faith and trust in him that we will obey whatever he wills for us. It is not a crude righteousness based upon a legal system. Legal systems have never succeeded without a love for the righteousness from God, which is true righteousness.

Paul also said the faith of Christ is to know him. And that means more than simple knowledge about him. When the Bible speaks of a man knowing a woman that means he was physically intimate with her. And to know Christ means being spiritually intimate with him. Remember what Paul said about our close relationship with Christ: “... **we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones**” (Ephesians 5:30).

The faith of Christ is also to know the power of his resurrection. The power of his resurrection is to raise our divine spirits from the dead to have eternal life. For Paul said to the Corinthians, “**But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruit of those who are asleep**” (First Corinthians 15:20). The power of his resurrection is the power to awaken us from the dead to take our souls to heaven.

Paul also said the faith of Christ is also to know the participation of his sufferings. That means to also experience sufferings as he did in his obedience to God. Remember what Paul said to the Romans about suffering jointly with Christ: “**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).

To conform means to be or become the same as or similar to. Being conformed to the death of Christ means dying to the evils of the world. For Paul said to the congregation at Galatia: “**And those of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and the lusts**” (Galatians 5:24). He also said about himself: “**But may it not be from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world**” (Galatians 6:14).

Paul said he did all those things so that “if somehow” he might attain to the resurrection of the dead. When he said “if somehow” that means the resurrection of his soul was not yet definite. Although denied by those who believe in the popular idea of once-saved-always-saved, Paul’s words are more evidence that as long as we live in this sinful world our souls can be lost.

## Not yet perfected, but pressing forward

- **Not that I have already obtained or have already been fully perfected, but I press forward, if also I might seize upon that for which also I was seized by Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12).**

Attaining to the resurrection of the dead, means being guaranteed resurrection to heaven. Paul said he had not already attained it. He sought to attain to it, but he had not yet obtained it. If Paul said he had not already obtained it, how can any man claim he did? We can certainly have confidence of eternal life as long as we remain faithful to Christ. But while we continue facing trials and temptations in the world, we will never actually obtain it until our lives here are over.

Notice how Paul also said he had not already been fully perfected. The expression “fully perfected” indicates satisfactory completeness about something. Notice how Jesus used those words: **“Behold, I cast out demons and finish cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am fully perfected”** (Luke 13:32). He meant his life in the world would not be satisfactorily completed until his death and resurrection. And so it is with us.

Consequently, Paul said he pressed forward, if also he might seize upon that for which he was seized by Christ Jesus. Paul was seized by Christ to become a son of God for eternity. Therefore, he pressed forward striving to seize that eternal sonship, which is what our resurrection represents. And we too are called by Christ for that sonship. We are called through his teachings, which have been recorded for us in the New Testament.

## Pressing forward to the prize

- **Brothers, I reckon myself not to have seized, but one thing, indeed forgetting the things behind, and reaching forward to the things ahead, I press forward toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. As many therefore as are perfect should think this way (Philippians 3:13-15).**

Paul was pressing forward because he had not yet become a son of God for eternity. As disciples of Christ we are all children of God. However, none of us will become a son of God for eternity until our spirit is resurrected into heaven. That is the prize at the goal toward which Paul was reaching. It is the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. For what could be a higher calling than for us to be offered eternal sonship with God? It was the one thing Paul was striving for, and for which all of his other efforts were focused. It is the ultimate prize God has set before us all.

Paul said he was forgetting the things behind. He forsook the things of his worldly life, and forgot them in the sense of not looking back to them. Remember what Jesus said about

that: **“No man, having put his hand to a plow, and looking to things behind, is fit for the kingdom of God”** (Luke 9:62).

Being perfect in the sense that Paul used the word in that passage means being fully mature as a disciple of Christ. Hence, all who are fully mature in Christ should think the way Paul described. Namely, to forget the things behind, and **“press forward toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”**

## Thinking anything differently

- **And if ye think anything differently, this also God will reveal to you** (Philippians 3:15).

When any disciple thinks differently from the teachings of the good news of Christ, God will also reveal it to him. He will reveal it to him through the record of the New Testament, whether he is taught it by another man or he reads it for himself. When Paul said that God would *also* reveal to him, he meant God would reveal to an already converted disciple, a man who already had the fundamentals of the good news revealed to him. Remember however, it is the responsibility of every disciple to accept and obey what is revealed to him. Many believers find excuses to reject many things the scriptures teach and command.

## March by the same standard

- **However in what we have attained, to march by the same standard, to think the same way** (Philippians 3:16).

What Paul meant by **“what we have attained”** was our growth and development in Christ. For example, Paul spoke to the brothers at Corinth about their faith growing in them: **“... having hope of your faith growing in you to be enlarged according to our measure for abundance ...”** (Second Corinthians 10:15). And Peter spoke about growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ: **“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (Second Peter 3:18).

The older I become, the more my faith has grown and the more knowledge I have acquired about Christ and his good news of our salvation. Remember, we all begin as babes in Christ. As Peter said, **“... 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 2:2-3).

Congregations also begin as newborn babes, and they too need to grow and develop. Hence, Paul said that to the extent a congregation has attained—to the level of their growth and development in Christ—they should march by the same standard. That means they should work together in the same standard, which standard is the teachings of Christ that have been recorded for us in the New Testament. When a group marches, it moves by an orderly progression. Hence, as a congregation grows in its knowledge of the good news of Christ, each member should unite together by it.

Moreover, Paul said they should think the same way, to the extent they have attained knowledge of the good news. They should be united according to their knowledge and

understanding of the word of God. That way they can move ahead by orderly progression. Remembering, of course, that our knowledge and understanding of the word of God (our common standard) should never stop growing. For the word of God is rich beyond measure in wisdom and truth.

## Become fellow-imitators of Paul

- **Brothers, become fellow-imitators of me, and watch those who so walk, just as ye have us for an example** (Philippians 3:17).

To imitate means to follow an example about something. One of the primary ways that children learn is by imitating their parents. Consider this passage: **“And become good toward each other, compassionate, forgiving each other, even as also God in Christ forgave us. Become ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children”** (Ephesians 4:32-5:1). When Paul told the Ephesians to become good toward each other, to be compassionate, and to forgive each other, that meant imitating God as his beloved children.

Imitation often provokes further imitation. A second man imitates the first man, then a third man imitates the second man, and so on. That is how both good and bad habits often spread. In our behavior we act as examples for each other. That is another reason why we need to be careful how we act in the presence of others. Our leavening effect on the world should always be for things good and right.

Paul told the disciples at Philippi to become fellow-imitators of him, because he was imitating God by living righteously according to the good news of Christ. Therefore, they could use him for an example. They could also imitate those who were imitating him: watching those who walked as he did.

Of course, imitation is always selective for specific things, but general for most things. We are not expected to imitate every act in precise detail like a reflection in a mirror. We should be fellow-imitators of Paul in living righteously as applied to our own personal circumstances.

## Many are enemies of the cross of Christ

- **For many walk (I told you often, and now also say while weeping) who are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and the glory in their shame, who mind earthly things** (Philippians 3:18-19).

The cross of Christ refers to sacrificing our earthly lives to obey the will of God. Sinners are unwilling to do that. However, not every sinner is an active enemy of the cross of Christ. Paul is here referring to men who are actively hostile, fighting against Christ and his good news of our salvation.

The book of Acts gives many examples of when the church was persecuted and attacked. Such enemies included both Jews and Gentiles. Remember, Paul himself was once an enemy of the cross of Christ. However, he was a rare exception, because he repented and became an ally instead.

The great majority of the enemies of Christ and his church are like those that Paul described in the above passage. Their end is destruction because their god is the belly, the glory in their shame, and they mind earthly things.

A man whose god is the belly is one who worships his fleshly pleasures for which he labors. Such men are enemies of the cross of Christ because the cross of Christ condemns them. The cross of Christ requires us to worship God only, and to restrict our fleshly pleasures to only that which he allows. That is anathema to the enemies of the cross of Christ. Therefore, they are hostile to it.

The glory of the enemies of the cross of Christ is in their shame. Things that to us are shameful, to them is their glory. They boast about things like getting drunk, committing fornication, wanton reveling, and successfully lying and cheating. We condemn such things. Therefore, they hate and oppose us.

Paul said the enemies of the cross of Christ mind earthly things. That means they live only for the things of the world. They take no thought about God and his will for us. Indeed, they commonly deny that he cares, or that he even exists. But in so doing they have no hope for the future, because their end is destruction. And there is no escape for them, because we will all be judged when this world is over.

Paul said he often told the Christians at Philippi that many walked as enemies of the cross of Christ. We all need frequent reminders that there are many who are hostile to us. Therefore, we need to always be on guard and beware. For such enemies can be very sly and subtle in their hostility, seeking ways to cause us to stumble.

## Our citizenship exists in the heavens

- **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).**

We are not citizens of this world, because Jesus chose us out of the world. He spoke of that when he was explaining why the world hates us: **“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).

Indeed, every soul who loves truth and righteousness is a foreigner to this world. The author of the book of Hebrews told about that when he gave many Old Testament examples of faith in God. Among his words about those examples, he said, **“All these died in faith, not having taken the promises, but who saw and greeted them from afar, and who confessed that they were foreigners and sojourners on the earth.**

**“For those who say such things show that they are seeking a fatherland. And if indeed they remembered that from which they came out, they would have had time to return. But now they aspire for a superior one, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore**

**God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”** (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Our citizenship exists in the heavens, not in this sinful world. Here we are foreigners and sojourners, awaiting our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ. He is going to transform this fleshly body of our lowliness to be like his glorious heavenly body. It will be an incorruptible body in the world of heaven where there is no sorrow and death. As members of the kingdom of God, the church, that is where our citizenship exists.

Jesus will make that transformation for us according to the working of his power, for his power is immeasurable. His power is so great that he is even able to subject all things to himself. And that is what he will do at the end of the world, when we who believe and love him will reside in our eternal fatherland there.

I explain much more about Jesus and the working of his power in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### So stand firm in the Lord

- **So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord this way beloved** (Philippians 4:1).

That passage shows the strong love that Paul had for them. He called them his brothers, because we are all spiritual brothers in Christ. But he also said they were beloved and longed for, and they were his joy and crown. When you have strong love for someone they are longed for by you; you want to be with them. And that is how Paul felt about the disciples at Philippi. Indeed, he felt that way about all of the disciples he converted to Christ. Remember, he never married, and he considered those disciples to be his children.

He also called them his joy and crown. They were his joy because they were the fruits of his labor for Christ. A crown is an ornament worn on the head that is given as a sign of success. Therefore, they were his crown because their existence was a sign of his success in building up the church of Christ.

After saying those words of affection, he told them to stand firm in the Lord this way. Standing firm this way means keeping our citizenship in the heavens. And as long as we remain faithful to Christ and his good news, we will keep our citizenship in the heavens. For our lives in this sinful world are short, but our lives in heaven with God and Christ will be for eternity. Therefore beloved brothers, always stand firm in the Lord.

### Thinking the same way in the Lord

- **I exhort Euodias, and I exhort Syntyche, to think the same way in the Lord. Yes, I ask thee also, genuine yokefellow, help them—the women who labored with me in the good news—with Clement also, and the rest of my co-workmen whose names are in the book of life** (Philippians 4:2-3).

This is the only place in the Bible that mentions Euodias and Syntyche. Therefore, we know nothing about them except they had labored with Paul in the good news, as well as with Clement and Paul’s other co-workmen. Paul exhorted them both to think the same

way in the Lord. They thought differently about some things of the good news, and apparently those differences were having some kind of harmful effect.

Therefore, Paul exhorted those two women to think the same way in the Lord. He also asked the man he called a genuine yokefellow to help them. Since no name is given, Paul may not have meant any particular man. In other words, he may have simply been asking that whoever read those words, and considered himself to be a genuine yokefellow with Paul, to help those women think the same way in the Lord. Nevertheless remember, our unity must always be based upon the word of God.

Notice how Paul referred to his co-workmen as having their names in the book of life. Every faithful disciple of Christ has his name in the book of life. Which book records our standing as citizens in the heavens. For, as the book of Revelation says, every man whose name is not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire: **“And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:15). Remember, the lake of fire is hell.

## Rejoice always

- **Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice** (Philippians 4:4).

Regardless of how much Paul suffered for the cause of Christ, he rejoiced in the Lord. And he urged us to always rejoice in the Lord. Remember how he spoke of some men who were preaching Christ while Paul was in bonds, supposing to bring affliction to him. Yet he still said, **“What then? Except in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice, but also I will rejoice”** (Philippians 1:18).

Paul truly had an indefatigable spirit that always rejoiced in the Lord regardless of how much he suffered. He was truly a great example for us to imitate. Therefore, resist the temptation to become discouraged and depressed. Those feelings beset all of us from time to time. But by remembering the example and admonitions of Paul will help us to have an indefatigable spirit like his, so that our spirit can rejoice in the Lord, even when our body is groaning with sorrows and pains.

## Show your gentleness

- **Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is near** (Philippians 4:5).

Gentleness is the opposite of roughness and brutality. A man with grace, virtue, and honor is called a gentleman. And I have no doubt that word has its roots in the Bible teachings that men of God should be gentle and not rough or brutal. God wants us to be gentle men. Not weak and cowardly, but humble and gentle.

Paul told us to let our gentleness be known to all men. And that means to act like gentlemen. However, always acting like a gentleman is not easy. For we are all sometimes frustrated and provoked. A true gentleman maintains his composure even when under stress.

Although there are times when strong and vigorous action is required, a true gentleman keeps control of himself. For example, remember the time when Jesus overturned the

tables of the moneychangers. He acted vigorously, but he kept his composure and remained a gentleman.

Paul added that the Lord is near. That probably means we should always remember that God is with us at all times. Therefore, we should always rejoice and display our gentleness to everyone. That will let people know the reason we are gentlemen is because of our faith. We can be gentle and composed because we have confidence that the Lord is always near us. Indeed, his Holy Spirit is in us.

## Be anxious about nothing

- **Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness make your requests known to God** (Philippians 4:6).

Remember, Jesus commanded us not to be anxious about our lives, what we shall eat, what we shall drink, what clothing we will wear (see Matthew 6:25-32). Moreover, he said, **“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 6:33-34).

Paul extended what Jesus said to include not being anxious about anything. It is good to care about things and be concerned about them. However, it is not good to worry and be anxious. Worry and anxiety accomplish nothing good, but only drain our energy.

Paul said that instead of being anxious we should in everything by prayer and supplication make our requests known to God. Our heavenly Father knows our every need even before we ask him. For Jesus said to his disciples, **“... your Father knows what things ye have need of before ye ask him”** (Matthew 6:8).

Nevertheless, he still wants us to ask him. He wants us to seek for him and have faith in him. And he wants us to ask rightfully—for things that are good, right, and just. For James said, **“Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:2-3).

James also said about asking for wisdom, **“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 that is true of all our prayers and supplications. They must be in faith, doubting nothing. We must also be patient, because he has his own time and ways to answer us.

Paul also said our prayers and supplications should be with thankfulness. We all receive immeasurable blessings from God. And he wants us to appreciate our blessings and express our thankfulness to him even when we are making prayers and supplications.

## The peace of God

- **And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 4:7).

The peace of God is that inner calm and confidence we have that is a result of our faith. That wonderful feeling is part of trusting God regardless of what happens to us. Paul said that serenity within our hearts surpasses all understanding. A main purpose in commentaries like this one is to explain things in the Bible. But how can I explain that which surpasses all understanding?

We can understand how our trust in God will give us peace within our hearts. But perhaps the depth and breadth of that peace is what surpasses all understanding. Perhaps it can only be felt and appreciated by those who have it.

Nevertheless, whatever it means Paul said the peace of God would guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. That means the inner calm and confidence we have in God will protect our hearts and our minds in Christ. It will defend us against the many stresses we endure, the many trials and tribulations we suffer. It will keep our faith and trust in Christ strong and secure.

Remember what Paul said to the Romans about the security of God's love for us: **“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).

As long as we are faithful to Christ, we are protected from every outside power. For no power can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And our inner calm and confidence, the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, will protect our hearts and minds in Christ. Therefore, we are protected from both without and within.

Therefore, be anxious about nothing. Keep your faith and trust in God, and nothing can harm your eternal soul.

## The kind of things to think upon

- **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).

That is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. And it gives an excellent summary of the righteousness of God. In that passage Paul listed seven things we should think on, and they are all parts of righteousness:

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  
 if anything is praiseworthy

We should think on those things, because we are always thinking about something. As long as our minds are conscious it is impossible not to think about something. Therefore, for us, as children of God, sanctified and made holy by him, we should focus our thinking on things of righteousness.

Thoughts lead to behavior. Therefore, thinking about things that are honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and praiseworthy will cause you to do things that are honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and praiseworthy.

The only time we should think on anything evil is when we are resisting, opposing, and combating it. And resisting, opposing, and combating evil is part of doing righteousness. Harboring evil thoughts will eventually make you evil. For thoughts lead to behavior.

One of the great benefits of our loving truth and righteousness is that we enjoy thinking about things that are honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Those are things the world hates, because they love evil. They have corrupted their hearts by thinking on whatsoever things are dishonorable, unjust, unclean, ugly, contemptible, immoral, and abominable. Therefore, it is an unholy world filled with evils.

Keep you heart and you mind pure and holy by thinking on those things that are honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous, and praiseworthy. That will cause your behavior to be righteous, and you will become worthy of being a son of God for eternity.

## What things they saw in him they should do

- **And what ye learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do, and the God of peace will be with you** (Philippians 4:9).

Paul told them to do the things they learned and received and heard and saw in him. That way the God of peace would be with them. Remember, when Paul said those things, the New Testament of the Bible was not available. Therefore, the only way those disciples of Christ could know how to be faithful to the Lord was from the things they learned and received and heard and saw in the apostles. For the apostles were the ambassadors of Christ.

Paul and the other apostles are no longer with us. However, they have left their testimony in the words of the New Testament. Therefore, if we too want the God of peace to be with us, we too must do the things we learn and receive and hear and see in the words of the New Testament.

## Thinking about him

- **But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last ye have revived thinking about me, in which also ye were thinking, but ye lacked opportunity** (Philippians 4:10).

Paul here, near the end of his letter, begins speaking about things they sent to him by Epaphroditus, which was a result of their revived thinking about him. However, Paul said although they were thinking about him, they lacked opportunity. What Paul obviously meant by thinking about him was concern about his welfare.

They were concerned about his welfare, but they lacked opportunity to do anything about it. However, Paul says farther that Epaphroditus gave them that opportunity. Hence, Paul said he rejoiced in the Lord greatly that they had at last revived thinking about him.

## Learned in all things to be content

- **Not that I speak regarding need, for I have learned in what things I am to be content. I know both how to be abased and how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to be lacking** (Philippians 4:11-12).

Regarding his need, Paul rejoiced greatly because of their demonstration of concern about him. That was the important thing to Paul, not simply receiving from them. And as evidence of it he told them how he had learned in what things he was to be content. He had learned what gave him contentment.

He said he knew both how to be abased and how to abound. That means he was content whether he was in want or in plenty, whether he was poor or rich. Paul said he had **“learned the secret both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to be lacking.”** The ability to be content, whether full or hungry, whether abounding or lacking, is a secret that must be learned. It is a secret because few people have that ability. Few people have it because it must be learned from experience together with the right kind of attitude and motive about life. What gave Paul content was his faith and hope in Jesus Christ, not in material things.

## Able to do all things in Christ

- **I can do all things in the Christ who strengthens me** (Philippians 4:13).

Paul had just said he knew how to be abased and how to abound. He knew how to endure either extreme, as well as everything in between, because he was in Christ who was strengthening him. We are all in Christ because we are parts of his body (in the world).

Hence, by saying that he could do all things in the Christ, he meant he could do all things in the Christ that he needed to do. As an apostle of Christ whatever were his circumstances, whatever were the demands on him, whatever were his trials and tribulations, he could endure them all, because Christ was strengthening him.

And for us, we too can do all things in the Christ who is strengthening us, not our flesh but our spirit. As disciples of Christ whatever are our circumstances, whatever temptations we face, whatever are our trials and tribulations as disciples, whatever we must do to be faithful to him, we can endure them all, because Christ is strengthening us. We too can do all things in the Christ who strengthens us, if we remain faithful to him. We can never become dispirited as long as we have faith and trust in him; Jesus never did.

## They did well sharing his affliction

- **Nevertheless ye did well having shared with my affliction** (Philippians 4:14).

Although Paul knew how to be abased and how to abound, and was able to do all things in Christ who strengthened him, he said they did well having shared with his affliction. Paul was able to endure being abased and being hungry, but it was better for him because they helped. They shared with his affliction with the things they sent to help him. They sacrificed some of their things to help relieve his affliction.

### Sharing in giving and receiving

- **And ye Philippians also have seen that, in the beginning of the good news when I departed from Macedonia, not one congregation shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent both once and again to my need** (Philippians 4:15-16).

What Paul meant in that passage by the beginning of the good news no doubt refers to the first time he journeyed to Philippi to preach the good news of Christ to them. That was during what we call his second missionary journey. After establishing a congregation there, he then went to Thessalonica. After that he went to Corinth, which was in the province of Achaia southwest of the province of Macedonia, in which were all of those cities.

It was during that time that not one congregation shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving except the Philippians only. That means only the disciples at Philippi made any contributions to Paul. Paul and the congregation there both gave to each other and received from each other.

As Paul said to the Galatians, **“But let him who is taught in the word share in all good things with him who teaches”** (Galatians 6:6). Hence, the Philippians received knowledge of the good news of Christ from Paul, and in turn they gave material things to him. Paul and the congregation both gave and they both received. Hence, the Philippians shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving. And they were the only ones who did during the beginning of the good news there.

The brothers at Philippi were so faithful in sharing with Paul that they even sent both once and again to his need when he was in Thessalonica on his way to Corinth. Thessalonica was in the province of Macedonia about sixty miles southwest of Philippi. Paul established a congregation there as well. Which was probably when the disciples at Philippi were sending to his need.

### Fruit that abounds to their account

- **Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account** (Philippians 4:17).

Paul was always able to provide support for himself, often laboring with his own hands. For example, among the last words he said to the elders of the congregation at Ephesus, on his way to Jerusalem, were these: **“Ye yourselves know that these hands served my needs, and to those who were with me”** (Acts 20:34).

Paul praised disciples who shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving because that was fruit abounding to their account. Such fruit was like the treasures Jesus spoke

about, when he said, “... lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust deteriorates, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:20).

When we share in the work of the good news of Christ we are bearing fruit that is being laid up in heaven for us. And that is what Paul sought for them.

## Receiving all things and abounding

- **But I receive all things, and I abound. I have been filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things from you, an aroma of fragrance, an acceptable sacrifice well-pleasing to God** (Philippians 4:18).

This letter begins by saying it was from Paul and Timothy. Then farther in the letter Paul said he hoped in the Lord to send Timothy to them soon. The letter also says that Paul had already sent Epaphroditus to them. Then in the above passage Paul said he had received from Epaphroditus the things from them. That means Epaphroditus was sent by them with those things before he returned to Philippi with this letter. For remember, Paul earlier said that Epaphroditus was “**your messenger and servant of my need ...**” (Philippians 2:25).

After receiving the things from them, Paul said he received all things, he abounded, and he had been filled. Those words indicate that whatever was the gift, it more than satisfied his need. He also called their gift an aroma of fragrance and an acceptable sacrifice that was well-pleasing to God. What they sent was obviously a significant contribution to him, although nothing is ever said about what those things were.

Being an aroma of fragrance meant the gift brought pleasure, spiritual pleasure both to Paul and to God himself. It was also an acceptable sacrifice that was well-pleasing to God. Not every sacrifice is acceptable to God. For Solomon said, “**The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with a wicked mind!**” (Proverbs 21:27).

Here is a passage about God rejecting the people’s sacrifices: “**Hear, O earth: Behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened to my words. And as for my law, they have rejected it. To what purpose does there come to me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me**” (Jeremiah 6:19-20).

Here is another one from the prophet Amos, where Jehovah said, “**I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream**” (Amos 5:21-24).

Sacrifices to God are only acceptable from those who do justice and righteousness. Here is a proverb that says even the prayers of the disobedient are offensive to God. “**He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination**” (Proverbs 28:9). The law of Moses even outlawed receiving gifts to God from harlotry: “**Thou**

**shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog [a male prostitute], into the house of Jehovah thy God for any vow, for even both these are an abomination to Jehovah thy God”** (Deuteronomy 23:18).

## God filling their every need

- **And my God will fill your every need according to his wealth in glory in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 4:19).

After saying that he had been filled and abounded, Paul then spoke about filling their needs. God is somehow able even through the laws of nature to fill our every need. That does not mean he will fill our every desire, because he knows better than we do what things are best for us. Therefore, we can have the confidence and peace of God that surpasses all understanding, knowing that he will fill our every need.

And he will fill our every need according to his wealth in glory in Christ Jesus. The wealth of God is in glory, which means his wealth is of splendor and magnificence. The wealth of men is in the vain things of the earth. The wealth of God is in glory, eternal splendor and magnificence.

And that glorious wealth of God is in Christ Jesus, because God has given him all things, as Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper, **“All things, as many as the Father has are mine”** (John 16:15). Therefore, as long as we are faithful to Christ, God will fill our every need.

## To God is the glory

- **Now to our God and Father is the glory into the ages of the ages. Truly** (Philippians 4:20).

Remember, the ages of the ages includes all time, every age. Therefore, regardless of the age, whether it be an earthly age or a heavenly age, to our God and Father is the glory. The glory is to him because he created all things, and he begot us from his own spirit to become his sons for eternity.

As disciples of Christ he is both our God and our Father, our heavenly Father, our spiritual Father. He both created us and he begot us of his Spirit. Every man is born a son of God, but he loses his sonship when he first sins. However, when we repent of our sins, and became disciples of his Son Jesus Christ, then God adopts us to be his sons again, sons of God for eternity in heaven. Therefore, to him is the glory. Truly.

## Saluting and being saluted

- **Salute every sanctified man in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me salute you. All the sanctified salute you, and especially those of the house of Caesar** (Philippians 4:21-22).

By telling them to salute every sanctified man in Christ (man in the generic sense), and that all the sanctified saluted them, Paul is saying we should all salute each other. A salute

is a greeting of respect and friendliness. Therefore, we should all show that respect and friendliness to each other. Remember, as children of God we are all spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thus, we should not only have a bond of fellowship and affection toward each other, but we should show it. For Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5). Hidden love is worse than open rebuke, and an open rebuke is certainly painful. Therefore, we should all salute each other.

Those of the house of Caesar were probably Christians who were among his servants. However, there may have been some Christians among his officials and family relatives as well. No information is given about who specifically were those of the house of Caesar. But it is not necessary for us to know. The main thing for us to know is that there were Christians who were of the house of Caesar, which was the highest level of rule of the greatest Empire of that time.

## The grace of Christ is with us

- **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with you all. Truly** (Philippians 4:23).

In each of Paul's thirteen books that are recorded in the New Testament, he reminded them, especially near the end of the books, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ was with them. And we should always remind ourselves that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with us all. Truly.



# A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to the Colossians

## His greeting

- **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:1-2).**

In nine of the thirteen books Paul wrote that are in the New Testament, he began by saying that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Remember, the word apostle means a man who is sent on a mission. And Paul was indeed sent by Christ to preach his good news of our salvation. And in six of those nine books Paul said he was an apostle through the will of God. It was God's will that Paul be an apostle of Christ.

Timothy probably transcribed Paul's words for this book, as he had with several of Paul's other books. Paul called the disciples at Colossae, to whom he was writing, the holy and faithful brothers in Christ. Every faithful Christian is holy, because God has sanctified us. And we are all spiritual brothers in Christ.

Saying that grace and peace was from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ was something that Paul did in all of his books. For only they can give true grace and peace. Saying those words was a way that Paul had of saluting them in his greeting.

Colossae was an inland city of the province of Asia. It was about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. There is no evidence that Paul ever went there. It is believed that the congregation at Colossae was established by evangelists that Paul sent while he was at Ephesus.

## The word of the truth of the good news

- **We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying about you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and love toward all the sanctified, because of the hope being reserved for you in the heavens, which ye heard before in the word of the truth of the good news being present for you, just as also in all the world (Colossians 1:3-6).**

Paul said he and those with him gave thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and were always praying about them. They were thankful to God and were praying about them because they heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and love toward all the sanctified.

As with the brothers at Colossae, it is because of our faith in Christ, and the love we have toward each other as his disciples, that we have the hope being reserved for us in the heavens. That hope is for us to become sons of God for eternity. Which hope is based upon God's promise that if we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ, then we will become his sons for eternity in the heavens.

They heard of that hope before. They heard it in the word of the truth of the good news that was present for them. That word was present for them because it had been proclaimed to them. However, it had not been proclaimed to them directly by Paul, because he spoke farther about them not having seen his face in flesh (see Colossians 2:1).

Paul said the hope we have that is being reserved for us in the heavens, that we heard in the word of the truth of the good news, is also present in all the world. That hope was given to us by Christ when he became our Redeemer. And that redemption is for all who belong to him, even for those who never heard him, nor have not yet heard him. His redemption is retroactive and proactive. The redemption of Christ is for all men in all the world who love God's truth and righteousness. That is why Paul could say at that early date the hope being reserved for us in the heavens is in all the world.

A man who never hears Christ can still have that hope if he qualifies as one of the sheep of Christ. That means if he has a spirit of humility, is open minded, and loves truth and righteousness. Remember however, if any man hears of Christ and rejects him, he will never have that hope. For the true sheep of Christ would never reject him. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **“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). We now hear his voice through the words of the New Testament.

## Bearing fruit and increasing

- **And it is bearing fruit and increasing, just as also among you from the day that ye heard and recognized the grace of God in truth** (Colossians 1:6).

Paul said that the word of the truth of the good news was bearing fruit and increasing. And it was bearing fruit and increasing among those disciples at Colossae, even from the day that they heard. They heard and recognized the grace of God in truth. The good news of Christ is called the good news because it brings the grace of God in truth. It brings his grace because through it we are redeemed from the condemnation of our sins, and have the hope of eternal sonship with God being reserved for us in the heavens.

When those disciples at Colossae heard the good news of Christ, they recognized it as the true grace of God. They recognized it because they were among the sheep of Christ. They heard his voice, and they followed him. Not literally of course, but spiritually, which is what everyone who chooses him now does.

## Epaphras made clear your love in spirit

- **Just as also ye learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow bondman, who is a faithful helper of the Christ for you, the man who also made clear to us your love in spirit** (Colossians 1:7-8).

There are only three references in the New Testament to Epaphras, two of which are in this letter to the Colossians. The other one is in Paul's letter to Philemon, where he refers to Epaphras as a fellow prisoner (see Philemon 1:23). Paul here refers to Epaphras as a fel-

low bondman. Remember, there is a big difference between being a bondman and a prisoner. We are all bondmen of Christ, whether we are prisoners in the world or not.

Paul spoke affectionately about Epaphras, calling him his beloved fellow bondman. He also spoke of him as a faithful helper of the Christ for them. Paul had many helpers from time to time. Paul said that Epaphras was being faithful in helping the cause of Christ for the congregation at Colossae. Epaphras may have been one of the men who established the congregation there.

Paul also said that Epaphras was the man who made clear to Paul and those with him their love in spirit. That was no doubt done with a personal report from him about the congregation there. Usually a personal report is the best way to inform about how someone feels.

When Paul spoke of their love in spirit, he was referring to the depth and sincerity of their love. Love can be shallow and superficial, or it can be deep and heartfelt. The love of the Colossians was deep and heartfelt, because it was in spirit. Their love was in their innermost being.

### Filled with the knowledge of his will

- **Because of this we also, from the day that we heard, cease not praying for you and making request that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9).**

Remember, Paul told them that he and those with him were always praying about them, having heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and love toward all the sanctified. And now again he tells them that they did not cease praying for them. But this time he says they were making request that they “**may be filled with the knowledge of his [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**”

It is exceedingly important for us to know the knowledge of God’s will. How else can we know how to be pleasing to him? Without the knowledge of his will we can only grope in the dark, trusting in our inborn conscience about right and wrong.

Man’s knowledge of God’s will has always come from his prophets. However, there have been no divinely inspired prophets since the time of the apostles. New prophets are not needed because the knowledge of God’s will has been recorded for us in the Holy Bible. The knowledge in that book is now all we need. And filling ourselves with that knowledge will give us wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Men of the world who ignore the Bible can develop wisdom and understanding about earthly things. But they remain ignorant about the greater world of spiritual things. They remain ignorant about God’s will for us. Consequently, they remain lost in a life of spiritual darkness and sin. For only knowledge from the Bible can give a man understanding about why we exist, and wisdom about how best we should live.

Therefore, cease not to pray and make request that ye may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And as you pray, study and work for that knowledge, because God only answers the prayers of those who work with him. Do you think that God will bless a farmer with good crops if he does nothing but pray for them?

## For them to walk worthily

- **For you to walk worthily of the Lord for every desire to please, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened in every ability, according to the dominion of his glory, for all perseverance and longsuffering with joy** (Colossians 1:9-11).

Paul prayed and made request that they “**may be filled with the knowledge of his [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**” And the reason is that they may,

walk worthily of the Lord for every desire to please  
 bear fruit in every good work  
 grow in the knowledge of God  
 be strengthened in every ability

With the knowledge of God’s will we can then walk worthily of the Lord, and not be stumbling in the dark. We can walk worthily of him for every desire to please. For every desire we may have in our lives should always be pleasing to him. We should never desire anything that would displease him. Evil desires should be resisted and combatted like evil diseases because they are a threat to our souls. And by so doing we can always walk worthily of the Lord.

With the knowledge of God’s will we can also bear fruit in every good work. There are countless good works that can be done, each varying according to a man’s circumstances and opportunities in life. But whatever good work we do, it will bear fruit as long as we have knowledge of God’s will for us and apply it.

With the knowledge of God’s will we can also grow in the knowledge of God. That means we can learn more about who he is and what he is like. And the more we grow in the knowledge of him, the better able we will be to see him in our spirit. And the better we can see him in our spirit the more we can marvel about him, the more we can rejoice in him, the more we can love and adore him, and the more we can be like him in our spirit. Unrepentant sinners can never experience the great joy of knowing God.

With the knowledge of God’s will for us we will also be strengthened in every ability. Our every ability will be strengthened because God’s will encourages us to strengthen them. Moreover, the knowledge of his will helps guide us in the best ways to strengthen our abilities. For the knowledge of his will contains many wise principles that are applicable to every endeavor.

Paul said they should do those things “**according to the dominion of his glory, for all perseverance and longsuffering with joy.**” The dominion of God’s glory is all things that are good and right and just. That is his glorious domain. And we should all live within that dominion. Let all that we do be good and right and just, whether in our thoughts, our desires, or our actions. Let there be no place in our lives for folly and wickedness of any kind. The world loves folly and wickedness, but such things are an abomination to God our heavenly Father.

And we should live righteously, according to the dominion of his glory, for all perseverance and longsuffering with joy. Living according to the dominion of his glory is not easy in this sinful world ruled by Satan. Nevertheless, we should always remember the hope

being reserved for us in the heavens. Which hope will be realized as long as we persevere in the dominion of God's glory, and endure longsuffering with joy. Even while we are suffering we can have joy in our hearts because of that supreme hope we have.

And that hope does not disappoint, as Paul said to the Romans: **“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.**

**“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 5:1-5).

### God made us qualified

- **Giving thanks to the Father who made us qualified for the share of the portion of the sanctified in light** (Colossians 1:12).

God our Father made us qualified by sending his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who gave his life so that all who believe in him might be redeemed. For it is only through faith in Christ and obedience to him that anyone can be made qualified for the share of the portion of the sanctified in light.

When we repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them, then we are redeemed from the condemnation of our sins, then we are cleansed and made holy, then we are sanctified and made righteous before God. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“... ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were made righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God”** (First Corinthians 6:11).

And that qualifies us for the share of the portion of the sanctified in light, which light Paul explains in the next passage.

### Rescued out of the power of darkness

- **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, who is an image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation** (Colossians 1:13-15).

God rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of Christ. That is what we share when we believe in Christ and obey him: escape from the power of darkness, and gain citizenship in the kingdom of Christ, which kingdom is light. As Paul said to the Ephesians, **“For ye were once darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ...”** (Ephesians 5:8).

Paul called Jesus Christ the Son of God's love. A son is an offspring. And Jesus was the offspring of God's love. That means he was a reproduction of God's love. For Jesus is the means by which God shares his love with all who love 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).

Spiritual salvation is redemption through the blood of Christ, and that means the forgiveness of our sins. Remember, with his perfect life in this world of self-sacrifice in obedience to God, Jesus earned the right to redeem all who belong to him. And his salvation includes eternal sonship with God in heaven. What greater love could he give us than that?

Jesus, the Son of God’s love, is an image of the invisible God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and the exact image of his essence. For the book of Hebrews says, **“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. Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights”** (Hebrews 1:1-3).

God is invisible to our mortal eyes. We can only see him conceptually, with they eyes of our mind. We can see God through our knowledge of the teachings and the life of his Son Jesus Christ. Remember what he said to Philip when asked to show them 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).

Paul also said that Jesus was the firstborn of all creation. Although denied by the promoters of the trinity doctrine, the Bible clearly says that Jesus was begotten of God. That means he was brought into being by God. And that means he did not exist before he was begotten. Believers in the popular trinity theory cannot accept that, but truth is never determined by popular opinion.

How Jesus was begotten is a great mystery, about which I will not conjecture. However, the Bible does indicate that Jesus was begotten before anything was created. As Paul said, Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. Before anything else God had the desire to share life. And Jesus was the first result of that desire. Jesus was the first, because God planned to use him as the means by which he would share life. When I say share life I mean to be brought into existence out of God’s own Spirit and live as his sons in heaven with him.

## In Christ all things were created

- **Because in him all things were created, things in the heavens and things upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or lordships or principal offices or positions of authority, all things have been created through him, and for him** (Colossians 1:16).

God the Father planned and designed all things, but it was in the Son of God that all things were created. Paul said that all things have been created through him and for him. Paul then gave examples. He first mentioned things in the heavens and things upon the earth,

within which are all things. He next mentioned things visible and things invisible, which also includes all things.

Paul then mentioned examples of rule, all of which were created through and for the Son of God: thrones, lordships, principle offices, and positions of authority. And that includes those in the heavens as well as those upon the earth. Paul listed those examples of rule to show their subordination to the Son of God. For they were all created through him and for him. The only rule higher than the Son of God is God the Father himself.

Not only were all things created through the Son, but all things were created for him. Jesus Christ the Son of God was the first result of God's desire to share life. And it was the desire of both God and his Son for him to have brothers to share life with him.

The body of man was created through the Son, but the spirit of man was breathed into him by the Father. Therefore, we are also sons of God, which makes us brothers with Christ. However, Christ is the only begotten Son of God.

The book of Hebrews speaks about our brotherhood with Christ, when it 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. For both he who sanctifies and those being sanctified are all of one, because of which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will declare thy name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to thee”** (Hebrews 2:9-12).

## He is before all

- **And he is before all, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might become preeminent in all things** (Colossians 1:17-18).

Since all things were created through him and for him, that makes him before all. That makes him the foremost and the utmost. That makes him supreme. And to prove his moral and spiritual supremacy, he lived a sinless life of self-sacrifice on the earth in perfect obedience to God. Therefore, God made him the head of the body, the church, which is the kingdom of the heavens.

Paul also said that in Christ all things hold together. Since all things were created for him, he controls all things and holds them together. The Son of God controls all things through the seven Spirits of God that radiate out from before his throne. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The Son is the beginning because he was begotten from God before anything was created. And when Paul said that Christ was the firstborn from the dead, he was referring to Christ being the first raised from the dead to sit in the throne of God. And when this world is over all of his faithful disciples will sit in the throne of God with him. For Jesus 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). In the new world the throne of God will be the entire new Jerusalem, in which we will all reign with God and Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is all of those things so that he might become preeminent in all things. It was even necessary for him to be the firstborn from the dead. The author of Hebrews explains more about why that was necessary: **“Since therefore the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might make him who has the power of death impotent, that is, the devil.**

**“And he might liberate these, as many as throughout all their lifetime were deserving of bondage, with a specter of death. For he certainly did not embrace agents, but he embraced the seed of Abraham.**

**“Therefore he was obligated to be made like his brothers in accordance with all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God, in order to make reconciliation for the sins of the people”** (Hebrews 2:14-17).

### All the fullness and the reconciliation

- **Because in him it was considered good for all the fullness to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens** (Colossians 1:19-20).

As disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit of God dwells in us. For Paul said, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16). However, the Holy Spirit dwells in us by measure, not in fullness. In contrast, Paul said it was considered good for all the fullness (of the Spirit of God) to dwell in Christ. And John the immerser 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).

Paul also said that it was through Christ that God was reconciling all things to himself, whether thing upon the earth or things in the heaven. Paul also spoke of that to the disciples at Corinth, when he said, **“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).

There is a need for reconciliation because of sin. Sin alienates us from God. And sin is the cause of all evil, because it is only in God that evil can be eliminated and prevented. And reconciliation with God is only possible through Christ. Reconciliation with God is necessary both for things upon the earth and things in the heavens. We can certainly see the existence of sin upon the earth, but only the Bible record reveals to us that there has been sin in the heavens as well. As Peter said, **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned,**

**but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...**" (Second Peter 2:4).

Sin is disobedience to God; it is opposition to him; it is conflict with him. And the result of that conflict is condemnation for every sinner. Consequently, each one of us has been condemned to death because of our sins. However, through the blood of the cross of Christ we who belong to Christ have been redeemed from that condemnation. We have been redeemed because Jesus' sacrifice qualified him to become the Redeemer of all who belong to him.

Therefore, even though our bodies are still condemned to die, our spirits have been sanctified and made righteous before God through the blood of the cross of Christ. Thus, making peace by reconciling us to him. How that reconciliation occurs in the heavens is not explained to us. It is not explained because we do not need to know such things.

Eventually all things will be reconciled to God, both things upon the earth and things in the heavens. They will be reconciled either willfully or forcibly. For even the most powerful and vicious of God's enemies will eventually be defeated and forced to bow down and submit to him. For Paul said to the disciples at Rome, **"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 14:11-12).

### Formerly alienated, now holy and unblemished

- **And you, who were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, in works, in things evil. But now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblemished and unblameable before him** (Colossians 1:21-22).

When Paul said "and you," he was not just referring to the brothers at Colossae. He was referring to all of us. Because before we became a disciple of Christ we were alienated to God. We were alienated because we had sinned against him. All of us more or less have sinned against God. And as with Adam, a single sin alienates us to him.

Regarding the words **"hostile in mind, in works, in things evil,"** we were all guilty more or less about those things. Hostility in mind refers to harboring thoughts that are offensive to God. Hostility in works refers to doing things that are offensive to him. Hostility in things evil includes anything that would offend him. And who has never harbored an evil thought? Who has never committed a sin? Who had never done anything wrong?

But now Christ, in the body of his flesh through death, he has reconciled us to God. His death on the cross was the culmination of his life of perfect obedience to God. And that earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all of us who belong to him, and reconcile us to God.

And with that redemption and reconciliation to God, our Savior Jesus Christ can now present us **"holy and unblemished and unblameable before him,"** before God. But all of that is contingent upon our continued faithfulness, as Paul says in the next passage.

## If we continue in the faith

- **If ye truly continue in the faith, founded, and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the good news that ye heard, which was proclaimed in all the creation under the heaven, of which I Paul became a helper (Colossians 1:21-23).**

Our being holy and unblemished and unblameable before God depends upon our continuing in the faith, founded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the good news that we heard. The hope of the good news of Christ is that we can become sons of God for eternity in heaven. And we now hear it from the words recorded in the New Testament, which were written by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit.

When Paul said that the good news was proclaimed in all the creation under the heaven, he did not mean that every soul had heard it. He probably meant that Christ's good news of salvation was now available in all creation under the heaven. Before Christ completed his mission upon the earth, not one soul in all the creation under the heaven had any hope of salvation. We were all condemned with the devil and the demons because of our sins against God. But now the proclamation in all the creation under the heaven is that salvation is available to us all.

Paul said he became a helper of that good news of our salvation. And the Bible record shows both how he began a helper, and the extent to which he spread the good news of Christ. He was truly one of the great helpers of that wonderful good news for us.

## Paul rejoiced in sufferings for them

- **I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and make complete in my flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).**

Everything about the good news of Christ came through afflictions. Throughout his ministry Christ suffered afflictions. And as his apostles worked to spread his good news they too were afflicted. Remember, Jesus warned them it would happen.

He said to them, **“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.**

**“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 21:12-19).**

And when the Lord sent Ananias to Paul after his vision on the road to Damascus, he said, **“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).

Since Paul wrote much of the New Testament, he could certainly say that he was making complete in his flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church. What was lacking were the words of the good news that had not yet been proclaimed and written. And since everything about the good news of Christ came through afflictions, then what Paul was making complete for the church (the sacred writings) involved the afflictions of the Christ.

And Paul’s faith and love for Christ was so great that he could even rejoice in those sufferings for them. Knowing that he was making complete in his flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, the church, then we can all rejoice in our sufferings when we know they are contributing to the growth of the church. Our body will groan, but our spirit will rejoice. A mother’s body groans when she gives birth, but her spirit rejoices knowing that she is bringing a new soul into the world.

## The wealth of the glory of the mystery

- **Of which I became a helper according to the administration of God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery that was hidden from the ages and from the generations, but has now been made known to his sanctified. To whom God wanted to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Colossians 1:25-27).

Paul earlier said that he became a helper of the good news. He now says he became a helper of the body of Christ, which is the church. The good news is the message of Christ, while the church is composed of his disciples. The church is a product of faith in Christ and his good news. Paul was a helper by proclaiming the good news of Christ, converting lost souls to him, and developing congregations of his church.

An administration is an act of administering. The administration of God is to administer to the church by proclaiming the good news, converting lost souls, and developing individual congregations of them. And it was according to the administration of God that Paul became a helper of it.

It was given Paul to become a helper of the church according to the administration of God. It was given him for their sakes, for them to fulfill the word of God. Fulfilling the word of God means to apply the word of God to our lives. That means to turn away from sin and deceit to live by truth and righteousness. And the word of God is the message and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The message of the good news of Christ was the mystery that was hidden from the ages and from the generations. The good news of Christ was the way God has of defeating all who hate him and rewarding all who love him. It was a mystery because nobody could understand how God could forgive the sins of those who love him without needing to forgive the sins of those who hate him. For justice is the foundation of his throne, and he cannot be partial.

The solution to that dilemma was the earthly life of his Son Jesus Christ. For the perfect obedience of Christ earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. And so now God can justly forgive the sins of all who love him, and still condemn all who hate him. That solution was a mystery hidden from the ages and from the generations, both on earth and in heaven. No doubt the devil and his disciples could not conceive that the Son of God would ever leave his glory in heaven to suffer and die as a poor and rejected man in the world.

Before Jesus became our Redeemer, Satan continually accused us to God. The book of Revelation tells about that, when it says, **“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 12:9-11).

The devil accused us before our God day and night because God could not condemn him for his offenses without condemning us for our offenses. Otherwise, God would be partial and unjust. But now, however, Jesus is able to redeem us from our condemnation. The devil will never be redeemed because he is too proud to ever live in the world as a man and submit himself to the lordship of Christ.

God through his holy word has revealed those things to us, his sanctified. Paul said that God made him a helper of Christ and his church because he wanted to make known what is the wealth of the glory of that mystery among the Gentiles. Namely, Christ in us, which is our hope of glory. For our heavenly Father, the God of the Bible, is the only true God of us all, and not just the sons of Israel.

## Striving to present every man perfect in Christ

- **Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, so that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. For which also I labor, striving according to his working, which works in me with power** (Colossians 1:28-29).

Christ was proclaimed by Paul and the other apostles with their co-workmen. They proclaimed Christ so that every man may be presented perfect in Christ. And that perfection comes from admonishing and teaching every man in all wisdom. To admonish is to encourage and urge to act. Teaching is to inform how to act and why. That admonishing and teaching must continue as long as the world exists.

Moreover, Paul said that admonishing and teaching should be done in all wisdom. That means when we promote Christ and his good news we should do it wisely, in the best and most effective ways, yet always faithful to the truth. The good news of Christ must never be compromised if men are going to be made perfect in Christ. Beware of the many false

teachings that claim to be the genuine good news of Christ. You can tell the genuine from the counterfeit by studying the word of God in the New Testament.

Regarding perfection, our being perfect refers to our being fully mature in Christ. For only God and Christ are absolutely perfect. And that full maturity comes from learning about the will of God for us and applying it to our lives.

Paul said he also labored to proclaim Christ so that every man might be presented perfect in him. Paul's most fruitful labor for that cause was in writing the books of the New Testament, including this one to the Colossians, because now only the words of the New Testament admonish and teach us how to grow to be perfect in Christ Jesus.

Any man who teaches anything different from the words of the New Testament is a false teacher. Men who claim to be successors to the apostles are liars. Men who claim to receive knowledge by divine inspiration are liars. Beware of all such men, because they are like Satan who **“disguises himself into an agent of light”** (Second Corinthians 11:14).

Paul said he labored, striving according to his working. He meant the working of Christ, which he said worked in him with power. That power worked in him through divine inspiration, because his writings have become a part of the New Testament of the Holy Bible. It also worked in him to perform miracles to prove that the good news of Christ is from God.

### Paul's great struggle to encourage them

- **For I want you to know how great a struggle I have about you, and those at Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in flesh. So that their hearts may be encouraged, having 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 2:1-3).

Both the congregations at Colossae and at Laodicea had never met Paul. Laodicea was only about ten to fifteen miles northwest of Colossae. They were both congregations of Gentile Christians. Although Paul had never seen them, he said he still had a great struggle about them, and as many as had not seen his face in flesh.

Saying that they had not seen his face in flesh implies they could have seen his face some other way. Perhaps from drawings or painting, or by verbal descriptions by those who had seen him. However, if such things existed they have never been found. No such things have ever been found about any of the characters of the Bible. Such knowledge about their appearances would not be good for us. How they looked is irrelevant. The character of our spirit is the important thing to God.

Appearances too often prejudice us. An example of that is when the prophet Samuel went to anoint David to be king of Israel in place of Saul who had proved himself unworthy. Jesse was the father of David, and he had eight sons. Here is what the record says happened when Jesse brought his sons to Samuel: **“And it came to pass, when they came, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely Jehovah's anointed is before him. But Jehovah said to Samuel, Do not look on his countenance, or on the height of his stature,**

**because I have rejected him. For Jehovah sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks on the heart”** (First Samuel 16:6-7).

Paul’s great struggle no doubt involved keeping the Christians there faithful to the truth of the good news of Christ. For he warned them farther in this book about men taking them captive through the love of wisdom and empty deceit. Remember, the New Testament had not yet been written. Without any writings they could only rely upon the testimony about the good news that was given them by men. Hence, Paul wrote this letter to them, to encourage them to be united together in love and full assurance of understanding and knowledge of the mystery of God. In other words, to remain faithful to the good news both in spirit (united in love) and in truth (knowledge and understanding).

Notice how Paul spoke of the wealth of understanding and knowledge, when he said, “**... all wealth of the full assurance of understanding, to knowledge of the mystery of the God and Father and of the Christ.**” He also spoke of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, when he said, “**In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**”

Wisdom and knowledge are treasures, and understanding is wealth. Those things are as light to us in darkness. They give us power to succeed. As Solomon said, “**Wisdom is the principal thing. Get wisdom, yea, with all thy getting get understanding**” (Proverbs 4:7).

Righteousness requires wisdom, which consists of knowledge and understanding. For how can we live right if we do not know what is right? Knowledge and understanding give us assurance. And what wealth could be greater than that? Material wealth is useless unless we know how to live right.

The sentence, “**In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,**” is somewhat ambiguous, because it is preceded by the words “**... to knowledge of the mystery of the God and Father and of the Christ.**” It is ambiguous because the phrase “in whom” is singular, yet the words before it speak of both God and Christ.

Nevertheless, God alone knows everything. For Jesus himself admitted that the Father knew things he did not: “**The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away. But about that day or that hour no man knows, not even the agents in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father**” (Mark 13:31-32).

God created everything and he knows everything. When scientists do research to discover laws of nature, they are merely trying to discover some of that wisdom and knowledge that God has hidden in the material things of the world. However, for the spiritual things, the Holy Bible contains the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that we need. And remember, knowledge of spiritual things is even more important for us than knowledge of material things. Our eternal survival and welfare depend upon it.

## Being deluded with persuasive speech

- **And I say this so that not any man may delude you with persuasive speech** (Colossians 2:4).

Paul wanted them to be encouraged, to be united together in love, and to have all wealth of the full assurance of understanding. And that comes from knowledge of the mystery of the God and Father and of the Christ. Accepting any other competing knowledge will only delude a man.

The world is filled with false teachings that create delusions in the minds of men. And those teachings are often presented with persuasive speech. Paul warned those Christians to beware of them. And we too need to be warned, because they are both seductive and deadly. Oh how much blindness and misery there is in the world because of such teachings. Examples are the false religions and ideologies that prevail in this dark world and lead men astray. They include the philosophy of humanism and the theory of evolution. Both of which are destroying my country, as well as the entire Western world, where faith in Christ had been so strong.

### Absent in the flesh, with them in the spirit

- **For even though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your orderliness, and the steadfastness of your faith for Christ (Colossians 2:5).**

Paul was with them in the spirit because he loved them. He loved them because he knew about them. He had heard from Epaphras of their **“faith in Christ Jesus and love toward all the sanctified ...”** (Colossians 1:4). In his spirit Paul was with every congregation that has faith in Christ and love toward all the sanctified. Remember, we are all spiritual brothers, united together as part of the body of Christ. Therefore, 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”** (First Corinthians 12:26).

Hence, Paul could tell the brothers at Colossae that he rejoiced about them. He said he saw their orderliness, and the steadfastness of their faith for Christ. He saw those things about them from the report he received from Epaphras. Our orderliness as disciples of Christ is a consequence of our unity, and our love for Christ and each other. It is a virtue we must have. Unlike the world, our orderliness together is not a result of fear and force. It is because of our love and obedience to Christ. It is not superficial, it is a heartfelt orderliness.

Paul also mentioned the steadfastness of their faith for Christ. That is another vital virtue we must have to be pleasing to God. When we become convinced about Christ, and commit ourselves to him, we must be steadfast in our faith. Steadfastness in our faith for Christ is a sign of spiritual health and strength. And such is a cause of rejoicing. Our steadfastness leads to fruitful service, doing whatever we can to promote truth and righteousness.

### Walk in the Lord as ye received him

- **As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as ye were taught, abounding in it with thankfulness (Colossians 2:6-7).**

They received Christ Jesus the Lord from the word of God that was taught them. As Paul said to the Romans, **“So faith is from hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). And having received the word of God about Christ we should walk in him. This means to live as he commanded of us, and as he himself demonstrated to us.

As Paul said to them, we should also be rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith. Being rooted means being solidly established. It means having a sound and firm foundation. Our foundation is faith in Jesus Christ. Being built up in him and established in the faith means growing stronger in our knowledge of the will of God for us, and in our applications of that knowledge to our lives.

That is what we are taught when we hear the word of God. And we should abound in those things with thankfulness as we walk in the steps of Christ. Our faith and our righteousness should grow richer and more productive as we are built up in him. Just as a tree bears more fruit as it grows larger, so we too should increase in our fruitfulness for the cause of Christ.

And that bountifulness should be accompanied with our thankfulness to God for all he has done for us, knowing that we can do nothing without his support and his blessings. Jesus himself many times expressed his thankfulness to God the Father. For example, he thanked God each time before he fed the thousands of the multitude with only a few loaves and fishes.

## Be not taken captive

- **Take heed lest there will be any man taking you captive through the love of wisdom and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the rudiments of the world, and not according to Christ. Because in him all the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily** (Colossians 2:8-9).

The kind of wisdom that Paul spoke about in that passage is worldly wisdom. And loving that kind of wisdom is like the love of money. Money is a means of gaining many things. Wisdom is also a means of gaining many things, including money. Money and wisdom are important for us. However, the Bible condemns both the love of money and the love of (worldly) wisdom, because loving them only will lead you astray.

Remember what Jesus said to his disciples about the rich: **“Truly I say to you, that a rich man will enter into the kingdom of the heavens difficultly”** (Matthew 19:23). And remember what Paul said about wisdom: **“Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world? 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.**

**“And because Jews demand a sign and Greeks search for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, it is truly to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness. But to them, to the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God”** (First Corinthians 1:20-24).

Therefore, if you let men persuade you to love wisdom itself you will be taken captive by them. You will become captivated by their clever theories and ideas, which will lead you astray. Wisdom from God is important and vital for us, but wisdom according to the tradi-

tion of men and the rudiments of the world will cloud your mind and lead you astray from the truth. And a modern example is the theory of evolution.

I have studied the popular philosophies of men. And believe me they are vastly inferior to the teachings of the Holy Bible. Just compare the history of those nations that have been guided by the words of the Bible with those that have been guided by the ideas of men, including men who have perverted the words of the Bible, such as the Catholic church.

True wisdom is according to Christ, because Paul said that **“in him all the fullness of the divinity dwells bodily.”** Paul was referring to the divinity of God the Father, all the fullness of which dwells in Christ bodily. That means the divine nature of God dwells fully in the body of Christ. It dwelled in his body of flesh, and it dwells in his heavenly body. And remember what Paul said about God and Christ: **“In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Colossians 2:3).

Therefore, true wisdom is from God through Christ. For knowledge about God and Christ will give you understanding about who you are, why you exist, and how you should live. That will give you a foundation for genuine wisdom, which will greatly enrich your life in this world, and above all it will give you hope of eternal life.

## Ye have been made full in him

- **And ye are men who have been made full in him, who is the head of every principal office and position of authority** (Colossians 2:10).

As faithful disciples of Christ we are men who have been made full in him. Being made full in Christ means being redeemed from our sins by him, sanctified, and made holy to become a part of his body, which is the church.

Being made full in Christ appears also to mean becoming mature and fully developed in your spirit. Because farther in this letter Paul also spoke of being made full, when he said, **“Epaphras, the bondman of Christ from you, salutes you, always striving for you in prayers, so that ye may stand perfect and made full in all the will of God”** (Colossians 4:12).

Paul also mentioned how Jesus is the head of every principle office and position of authority. Paul also spoke of that to the disciples at Ephesians, when he said, **“Having raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated at his right hand in the heavenly things, far above every principle office, and position of authority, and power, and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is coming”** (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Also when the book of Revelation tells about battling the enemies of God, it says Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings: **“These [enemies of God] will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those with him are the called and chosen and faithful”** (Revelation 17:14).

## Circumcision not made with hands

- **In whom also ye were circumcised a circumcision not made with hands, in the removal of the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of the Christ (Colossians 2:11).**

Paul is here speaking figuratively of circumcision. Physical circumcision involves the removal of the foreskin of a man. As a descendant of Abraham, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth in accordance with the commandment. However, the circumcision of the Christ that Paul mentions here is our circumcision of the sins of our flesh. Our spiritual foreskin symbolizes the sins of our body of flesh.

As physical circumcision was commanded of Abraham and all who belonged to him, so also the figurative circumcision of the Christ is commanded of all who belong to him. Hence, becoming a part of Christ means putting off or removing from our body the sins of our flesh. That enables us to be sanctified and made holy before God. Sin defiles us, and no man can be holy as long as sin remains in him. And only those who are holy can become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

## Buried with him in immersion

- **Having been buried with him in immersion, in which also ye were raised together through faith of the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:12).**

Paul also told how we were buried with Christ so that we could walk in newness of life, when he 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. For he who has died has been made righteous away from sin” (Romans 6:3-7).**

Peter also wrote about our souls’ salvation through immersion, immersion in water: **“... 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, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, agents, and positions of authority, and powers having been subordinated to him” (First Peter 3:20-22).**

Yet most men who claim to teach the good news of Christ deny the necessity of being immersed in water for salvation. Indeed, most people who claim to believe in Christ refuse to be immersed in water for their salvation.

Beware, dear reader. Such people are going to be like the man in the parable who accepted an invitation from a king to a wedding, but he did not put on a wedding garment. Remem-

ber the end of the story: **“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 22:13-14).

Being buried with Christ in immersion enables us to be raised together with him, raised to walk in newness of life. It is for us a spiritual resurrection to walk in the world in newness of life. That will be followed after the death of our body by the resurrection of our divine spirit into heaven.

Nevertheless, our burial with him in immersion must be voluntary. For we can only be raised together with him through faith of the working of God. For that reason infants and young children cannot qualify. God does not require immersion in water for them. He takes care of them another way. I explain those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## He made you alive with him

- **And you, being dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you he made alive together with him, having forgiven us all the transgressions, having erased the handwriting against us in the regulations that were hostile to us, and he has taken it up from the midst, having nailed it to the cross** (Colossians 2:13-14).

Death is caused by transgressions against God. And remember, just as with Adam, a single transgression brings the curse of death. Death is the consequence of transgressing the will of God, because only he is able to create and sustain life. Consider our chromosomes—the biological substance from which we became alive and by which we continue to live. Those chromosomes are complex chemical instructions that are inherited from our parents, and are used to develop and maintain our body. And each one of the billions of cells in our body contain those instructions.

If any part of those chromosomes in a cell is changed from what we inherited, the cell becomes abnormal and either dies or adversely affects our body. The medical literature contains whole libraries of the many abnormalities and diseases created by changes to the chromosomes of the body.

Sin and transgressions against God’s will for us are just like making changes to the biological instructions of our body. However, sin against God is even more dangerous, because one sin condemns us to death. A single sin is deadly because of the enormously more complex system of the spiritual realm. Just as early man was ignorant of the complexity of our body, so we are ignorant of the complexity of the spiritual realm of our soul.

One thing we do know about it is that a single violation brings death, because it undermines the complex functioning of that spiritual system. God is not being arbitrary by condemning us to death when we sin. It is an inevitable consequence of spiritual life. It is just as inevitable to our spirit as plunging a knife into our heart would be to our body.

Paul also spoke of the uncircumcision of our flesh. He used the example of circumcision to them because they were so familiar with that mark of identity for the Jews. As a descen-

dent of Abraham, a Jew would be part of God's chosen people, but only if he was circumcised. Not being circumcised disqualified an Israelite man from belonging to God's people. In an analogous way, a sinful life is like uncircumcision in the flesh. It disqualifies a man from belonging to God's people.

However, when we repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them to become a disciple of Christ, then God makes us alive together with him. He forgives us all the transgressions against him. It is like repairing all of the damage done to an abused body. Except what God does is much better. He makes us spiritually begotten again with a pure and undefiled spirit.

Peter spoke of that, when he called us **“men who have purified your souls in obedience of the truth through the Spirit for non-hypocritical brotherly love. Ye should love each other fervently from a pure heart, begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God that lives and remains into the age”** (First Peter 1:22-23).

Jesus first spoke of being begotten again in spirit when he 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).

The handwriting against us in the regulations that were hostile to us refers to the law. The handwriting of regulations refers to legal systems, whether the law of Moses for the Jews, or the laws of right and wrong for the Gentiles. Every man is born subject to the regulations of a legal system, because every society has one (whether written or not). And every legal system was created to promote the good and oppose the evil. And whoever violates the regulations becomes guilty.

Each one of us is also born with knowledge of good and evil, although like walking it takes a while to develop. And each one of us is judged by God according to that knowledge of good and evil. That knowledge is inborn intuitive knowledge. We sense right and wrong. It is like unseen handwriting within our minds. And whenever we sin and do something evil, we become guilty before God. And remember, any such guilt is fatal to our souls.

That handwriting was against us because none of us has the strength of character to keep from doing something wrong. Hence, we have all become condemned because of that handwriting. Paul explains all of that in his book of Romans. I also explain more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Jesus erased that handwriting by his sinless life, obeying God fully even to death on the cross. His perfect obedience to God earned him the right to redeem our souls from condemnation. He figuratively nailed the handwriting to the cross with his personal sacrifice. That means we are no longer under law to God. He no longer judges us by a legal system. He has adopted us to be his sons and daughters. And what father is so foolish as to judge his children by a legal system?

## Triumphing over powers

- **Having stripped the principal offices and the positions of authority, he exposed them openly, having triumphed over them by it (Colossians 2:15).**

By his sinless life in the world as a man in the flesh, serving God in perfect obedience, suffering and dying in sacrifice of himself, Jesus triumphed over the principle offices and positions of authority, both in heaven and on the earth. The Son of God was challenged by the rulers of the world when he was here, and he was challenged by some of the rulers in heaven when he was there.

Satan, God's great adversary, had been in heaven. Jesus called him the ruler of this world (see John 12:31). But he was apparently also some kind of ruler in heaven because the Bible says he had many agents there (see Revelation 12:7-8). The book of Job tells how Satan challenged the Son of God in heaven before Jesus' great triumph in the world. Remember, the Jehovah mentioned in the Old Testament was the Son of God. For when Paul was speaking of the Israelites traveling in the wilderness, he said they **"drank from a spiritual rock that followed them. And the rock was the Christ"** (First Corinthians 10:4).

Here is part of what the book of Job says about how Satan challenged Jehovah: **"Now it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, that Satan also came among them. And Jehovah said to Satan, From where do thou come? Then Satan answered Jehovah, and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.**

**"And Jehovah said to Satan, Have thou considered my servant 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. Then Satan answered Jehovah, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing? Have thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? Thou have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce thee to thy face"** (Job 1:6-11).

With those words, Satan was saying that Jehovah did not know what he was talking about. He claimed Jehovah had it wrong. Satan claimed that he knew Job better than God did. He knew why Job lived righteously, and he knew what Job would do if God allowed him to be oppressed. Therefore, he challenged God about Job. And how Satan felt about Job is how he feels about all men. In his eyes we are all hypocrites toward God.

Satan is very cunning. And he knew that if God would not allow Job to suffer that way, then Satan could claim that Jehovah did not trust his own judgment. If God did allow Job to suffer that way, and Job did renounce him, then Satan could claim victory in the presence of those sons of God in heaven. However, Job did not renounce God even when he suffered severely. Nevertheless, Satan continued to look for opportunities to challenge God. Remember how he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (see Matthew 4).

With Jesus' life of perfect obedience to God in his complete self-sacrifice, he proved conclusively that he was morally and spiritually superior to every soul, and worthy of reigning with God in his throne. Thus, he stripped the principle offices and the positions of authority, both in heaven and on earth of any challenge to him.

Instead he exposed them openly, having triumphed over them by the culmination of his sinless life with his death on the cross. For nobody in heaven or on earth could ever endure the kinds of trials and tribulations, temptations and sufferings he did and yet remain sinless. Consequently, his complete superiority could never be challenged by anyone.

Jesus also triumphed over his greatest enemy, that mighty power called Satan. But Satan refused to accept it, resorting to war instead: **“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”** (Revelation 12:7-8). God continues to tolerate Satan for a while, but when this world is over Satan and all who follow him will be cast into the lake of fire called hell.

## Rules and rituals are a shadow

- **Let not any man therefore judge you in eating, or in drinking, or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of the things coming, but the body is Christ’s** (Colossians 2:16-17).

Unlike the law of Moses, we have no commands about eating and drinking (except blood). We have no commands about special celebrations and special days. Paul said those things are a shadow of the things coming. What he meant by the things coming were the heavenly things that will be in the new heaven and earth. We know not what those things will be, but we do know that we will reign with God and Christ in the capital city of the new Jerusalem of heaven.

The author of the book of Hebrews also told about how the things of the law were only a shadow. For example, when he was speaking of Christ as our high priest, he said, **“For every high priest is appointed in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices, whereupon it is necessary for this man also to have something that he may offer. For certainly if he were on earth, he would not even be a priest, there being the priests who offer the gifts according to the law, who serve for an example and shadow of the heavenly things”** (Hebrews 8:3-5). What Christ offered was the sacrifice of his own body.

Hebrews also tells how the sacrifices of the law could never perfect us: **“For the law having a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the same substance of the events, with the same sacrifices that are offered continually each year, they are never able to fully perfect those who are approaching”** (Hebrews 10:1). Only the sacrifice of the sinless Christ was able to fully perfect us, meaning all who belong to him.

Paul said the body is Christ’s. That means his body was the one perfect sacrifice that supplanted all the rules and rituals of the law. It was the one perfect sacrifice that was able to fully perfect us.

## Let no man umpire against you

- **Let no man umpire against you insisting on self-mortification, and worship of the agents, intruding in things that he has not seen, vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh, and not holding to the head, from whom all the body,**

**being supplied and held together through the connections and bonds, develops its growth from God** (Colossians 2:18-19).

To umpire against a man is to find him guilty for what he does. Paul warned the Colossians about accepting any accusations from men who insist on self-mortification and the worship of agents. Nowhere in the Bible can we find where God honored self-mortification (or the worship of agents).

There were a few times when the Israelites were to deprive themselves besides their animal sacrifices. For example, once a year they were to eat only unleavened bread for seven days: **“And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for in this selfsame day I have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore ye shall observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance forever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses, for whoever eats that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a sojourner, or one who is born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened, in all your habitations ye shall eat unleavened bread”** (Exodus 12:17-20).

And once a year they were to dwell in booths (like huts or shacks) for seven days: **“However on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruits of the land, ye shall keep the feast of Jehovah seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And ye shall take to you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before Jehovah your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast to Jehovah seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations. Ye shall keep it in the seventh month. 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 23:39-43).

They were also to fast one day a year, which was called the day of atonement. Here is the law about that day: **“And it shall be a statute forever to you. In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work, the home-born, or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you. Ye shall be clean from all your sins before Jehovah. It is a sabbath of solemn rest to you, and ye shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever”** (Leviticus 16:29-31). The expression about afflicting their souls refers to fasting.

However, none of those commands are now required even of the Jews, because the law of Moses is no longer in effect. Moreover, God never required anyone to perform self-mortification. People who engage in self-flagellation and other kinds of self-mortification puff themselves up with pride. For such things are not pleasing to God.

Regarding the worship of agents, the Catholic Church is perhaps the most active in promoting such things. Indeed, they even promote worshiping certain men and women they designate as “saints.” Instead of praying to God, they pray to their chosen “patron saint” whom they believe will better benefit them. They have special patron saints for all kinds

of diseases, occupations and other activities, and even places. There is nothing in the Bible about such things; they are foolish inventions of men.

Foolish men, who insist on things like self-mortification and the worship of agents (earthly or heavenly), are vainly puffed up in the mind of their flesh. They invent such things and demand that others accept them. Paul commanded us not to allow such men to umpire against us. It is they who deserve being condemned.

Paul also reminded those disciples that Christ is our head, to whom we must hold fast. His commandments and his examples are what we must follow, not the foolish ideas of men. Paul said it was from the head that all the body develops its growth from God. That is both literally and figuratively true. It is literally true because the master gland of the body, the pituitary is located in the head. And that gland controls the growth of the body. And it is Christ our head that controls the growth of his body in the world, which is the church.

Christ controls the growth of the church through his words of the New Testament. But it is God who gives the growth. For when Paul was speaking about the growth of the church, he said, **“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 3:6-7).

Like a farmer, we can only plant the word of God in the minds of men, and carefully nourish it with love. Then we must wait for God to give the growth. However, we cannot blame ourselves or God if there is no growth because the soil is bad. Remember the parable of Jesus about the effect of different kinds of ground on the seed (see Matthew 13).

Paul also mentioned how the whole body was supplied and held together through the connections and bonds. The master gland in the head controls the growth of the body by sending hormones through all the connections of our vascular system. And the brain in the head uses all the connections of the nervous system throughout the body to coordinate all of the parts. Our head holds us together. That is why men speak of a man whose mind becomes deranged as going to pieces, or a man who goes berserk as losing his head.

In like manner, it is from Christ, through his example and teachings contained in the New Testament, that his body the church is supplied and held together. Its connections and bonds consists of the love and loyalty we have for Christ and for each other. Thus, by obeying the teachings of the word of God, and loving each other, the Holy Spirit of God will develop the growth of the church.

## Ye died with Christ from rudiments

- **If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why do ye submit to rules, as though living in the world? Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch (which are all things for consumption by use), according to the commandments and teachings of men? (Colossians 2:20-22).**

The rudiments of the world (of men) consists primarily of their legal systems, which they use to control men. We are bound to such things as citizens of the world. But for our relationship with God, we have been freed from a legal system. With God we are not bound to

statutes and ordinances about what to handle and what to eat, like the commandments and teachings of men. As long as we live righteously in God's sight we have liberty.

When Paul was speaking of the material things of the world, he said they were all things for consumption by use. Whether those things are items of food used to eat, or whether they are items used for the construction of things men build, they were given to us by God to consume for whatever useful things we decide to create. The trees of forests, the ore and other minerals in the ground, and the beasts of the earth, are all for our consumption by use.

God gave the world to mankind when he created it. And we are expected to consume the things of it creatively so we can multiply and have power over it. For after the Creation, God said to mankind, **“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 1:28). That way we can continue multiplying and developing what God created for us.

### No value against indulgence of the flesh

- **Which having, are indeed a matter of wisdom in will-worship, and self-mortification, and austerity of the body—not in any value against indulgence of the flesh** (Colossians 2:23).

The rules, commandments, and teachings of men involve matters of wisdom in will-worship, self-mortification, and austerity of the body. You can see those things very evident in the training of athletes and soldiers. Those things are aspects of discipline that make them more successful in achieving their goals.

However, such things have no value against indulgence of the flesh. Indeed, athletes and soldiers both have a reputation of low morals.

Matters of wisdom in will-worship, and self-mortification, and austerity of the body are about controlling the flesh, not the spirit. They are in fact very deceptive. They are good and useful in their place, but they cannot substitute for a converted heart. They can never substituted for repenting of our sins and committing our lives to obey Jesus Christ and his good news of salvation.

### Seek the things above

- **If therefore ye were raised with the Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Think on the things above, not the things on the earth** (Colossians 3:1-2).

The spirit of every genuine disciple of Christ has been raised with him. Remember this passage: **“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).

Therefore, we should seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. The things above refer to God and his righteousness. Paul also said we should think on them, not the things on the earth. We should set our heart on God and his righteousness. As disciples of Christ it is not only our duty to seek the things of God and his righteousness, but we should think on them. We should love and desire them, and meditate on ways to live according to them.

Remember what Jesus said: **“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”** (Matthew 6:31-33).

And remember these words of Paul: **“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).

Those are the kinds of things we should seek and think on, not the things on the earth. The things on the earth are opposite to those things above that Paul listed in that beautiful passage. Things of the earth included things that are dishonorable, things that are unjust, things that are corrupted, vile and odious things, contemptuous things, things that are vices, things that deserve condemnation. And it grieves my soul that such things are increasing in my country. Those things are even being promoted and praised. Examples include gambling, drunkenness, sex perversions, filthy speech, and such like.

## Lives hidden with Christ in God

- **For ye died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God. When the Christ, our life, is made known, then ye also will be made known with him in glory** (Colossians 3:3-4).

We died to the things of our corrupted fleshly nature. Our old man of flesh died and we now walk in the newness of the life of the new man. As Paul said to the Ephesians, **“... put off the old man according to your former conduct, the man who is corrupt according to the desires of deceitfulness, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man according to God, the man who was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”** (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Paul said that our new life has been hidden with the Christ in God. That means we are no longer independent and alien to God. We are now a part of the body of Christ. Our lives now belong to God through Christ, united and integrated within the body of Christ, which is the church. Hence, we live according to his will, not our own. Our lives have been hidden with the Christ in God, hidden in the sense of being united with him. Just as each cell of our body of flesh is hidden in the unity of that body.

And that means when the Christ, who is our new life, is made known at the end of the world, we also will be made known with him in glory. Being made known with him in glory means being recognized as a son of God to live in heaven with him for all eternity.

## Put to death the body-parts of your flesh

- **Put to death therefore your body-parts on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry** (Colossians 3:5).

Paul lists here some of the characteristics of our corrupted flesh, things of our old man that we must put to death in our new man. He calls them our body-parts because they are characteristics of our flesh. They are the urges, impulses, and lusts of our flesh that have been corrupted by sin. Paul gives five examples:

fornication  
uncleanness  
passion  
evil desire  
greed, which is idolatry

Remember, fornication is a general term that includes all the different sins of sex, of which there are many. Our sexual appetite can be strong, but God has given us the right ways to satisfy it. Fornication refers to all the wrong ways to satisfy that urge and indulge it.

Uncleanness is another general term that includes many things. It does not refer to the unavoidable uncleanness of righteous labor. It refers to spiritual uncleanness, things that defile our souls. Remember what Jesus said when he was criticized for not washing before he ate: **“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 15:17-20).

Paul’s use of the word passion in his list refers to extreme uncontrolled emotions. Our emotions help energize us. They are like the engine of an automobile. However, passion is like an engine in a car that operates at full power without control. Rage is an example of passion.

The word passion originally referred to suffering. That is why Jesus’ betrayal and crucifixion is often called his Passion. However, that meaning has long been obsolete. To apply that English word now to his betrayal and crucifixion is a big mistake. Why not call it what it was: his great suffering?

Evil desire refers to anything desired that is evil. And that too is a very general expression. For there are virtually unlimited things of evil that men have desired and will desire. Evil desire leads to evil behavior, and evil behavior is the cause of all the troubles and sorrows of the world.

Greed means desiring things to excess. Covetousness is another word for greed. And remember, the last of the ten commandments forbids coveting (see Exodus 20:17). A man who is greedy and covetous is actually paying homage to material things. It is a form of worshipping them. They are his god, which means he is an idolater.

## Why the wrath of God

- **Because of which the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience, in which ye also once walked when ye lived in them** (Colossians 3:6-7).

The wrath of God is not limited only for the afterlife. The wrath of God comes against the sons of disobedience in this life in various ways. We can see some of those ways from the history of the sons of Israel, including the many warnings God gave about forsaking him.

You can read about both the many blessings and the many curses that Jehovah said would happen to them, contingent upon their obedience or disobedience. They are found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. I also write much about them in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

The history of Israel is an example for us all. For the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience, whether they are sons of Israel or are Gentiles. The book of Hebrews tells how the punishment of the sinful Israelites serves as an example for us: **“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.**

**“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 10:1-12).

The book of Revelation also mentions how the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience through various plagues: **“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).

Therefore dear reader, do not accuse God when you see destruction resulting from things like earthquakes, floods, wind storms, plagues of diseases, and other disasters of nature. They are expressions of the wrath of God against the sons of disobedience. And the only way to stop them is for men to repent and obey their Creator God. Remember however, innocent people sometimes suffer because of the sins of the guilty. Therefore, we cannot condemn anyone just because they have suffered from some disaster.

Regarding the expression “sons of disobedience,” such men are sons in a spiritual sense; they are offspring of sin and wickedness who both inherit and reproduce evil. They are chronic sinners who are committed to evil. For those men, living in evil is natural. Nevertheless, they could still be converted away from evil by repenting and obeying Christ. For Paul said that some of the Colossian brothers once walked in disobedience when they lived in them.

## Put off evil things

- **But now ye also, put off all these things: anger, wrath, wickedness, reviling, filthy speaking out of your mouth** (Colossians 3:8).

In that passage Paul listed five more aspects of our corrupted flesh, things of our old man that we must put to death for our new man:

anger  
wrath  
wickedness  
reviling  
filthy speaking

Anger itself is not wrong, because the Bible says that God sometimes becomes angry. Anger is wrong when it causes sin. Remember what Paul said to the Ephesians: **“Be ye angry, and sin not”** (Ephesians 4:26). The anger that Paul says we should put from us is the wrong kind. Harboring anger is wrong. Uncontrolled anger is wrong. Unjustified anger is wrong. Having a spirit of anger is wrong. The right use of anger is when it arouses us to do good and oppose evil.

Wrath is intense anger. God is also said to have wrath when he is provoked sufficiently. Wrath is something we should rarely have. It is not wrong when it is justified and is used to energize us to oppose the wrong. However, remember the words of James: **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God”** (James 1:19-20). Wrath does not energize constructiveness, but destructiveness; although, sometimes that may be necessary.

Wickedness is the worse kind of evil. And a wicked man is the worse kind of man. He is the most dangerous because he uses his intellect to disguise his evil. Such men are dangerous predators. There are basically three kinds of sinners. One kind are fools who live ignorantly. Another kind are wicked men who prey upon other men. But the great majority of men live in sin because they are misled about spiritual things.

To revile means to use abusive or contemptuous language about someone. As sons of God we should not revile anyone, even the devil himself. For example, speaking about certain sinful men, Jude said, **“As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, the same kind of way with these who indulged in fornication, and who went rear of queer flesh, are set forth an example, undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.**

**“Nevertheless in the same way also these men who dream, indeed defile flesh, and reject lordship, and speak evil of dignities. But Michael the arch-agent, when he disputed with the devil, contending about the body of Moses, dared not bring a railing**

**judgment, but said, May the Lord rebuke thee. But these men indeed revile whatever they have not seen. But whatever they understand naturally, as the irrational beasts, in these things they are corrupted. Woe to them!”** (Jude 1:7-11).

Everybody but a young child knows what filthy speaking is. It is completely unnecessary to use vulgar words in speech. And no man can retain his dignity when he uses them. Using filthy speech reveals a base and crass mentality. The increase in filthy speaking in America is just another part of their moral and spiritual decadence. Not content with taking God’s name in vain, one of their vulgarisms now is to even call our most filthy body-waste, holy. Every time I hear that evil expression I feel like I have been stabbed. Thank God I only hear such things (via closed caption) on TV. People around me never use filthy speech because I do not associate with morally degenerate people.

## Do not lie to each other

- **Do not lie to each other ...** (Colossians 3:9).

Lying to other people is a normal occurrence in the world. And all but the most naïve children know it. It is part of what they consider the game of life. It is normal for the world because Paul said that the spirit of Satan, the ruler of the power of the air, works in them. For Paul said to the disciples at Ephesus, “... **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. Among whom we also all once behaved in the lusts of our flesh, doing the intentions of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath as also the others”** (Ephesians 2:2-3).

And remember, Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies. “**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).

As children of God, we cannot lie to each other. Lying destroys trust. And trust is what unites and holds society together. The world knows that because they have created many laws to combat lying. However, as faithful children of God we need no laws to keep us truthful, because we have the Spirit of Christ in us.

## Strip off the old man and put on the new

- **... having stripped off the old man with his practices, and having put on the new man, being renewed in knowledge according to an image of him who created him, where there is no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman, but the all and in all, Christ** (Colossians 3:9-11).

The “old man” with his practices is the life of the flesh, seeking to satisfy and indulge the lusts of the flesh. As children of God we have stripped off the old man of us, and put on the new man. Our new man is being renewed in knowledge according to an image of him who created him, our Lord God.

And the knowledge by which our new man is being renewed is found in the Holy Bible. Our new man is not renewed in the knowledge of men, but in the word of God. Therefore, let no man seduce you away from reliance upon the knowledge in the Bible. Study its words and apply them to your lives so that your new man will continue being renewed.

Our renewal is according to an image of God who created our new man. Therefore, we should all the more study the life and teachings of Jesus Christ the Son of God. That way we can become more and more like him. We can be an image of God, not just in the existence of our spirit, but in the character of our spirit.

Remember what God said at the beginning of the world: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27).

By putting on the new man, and being renewed in knowledge according to an image of him, we can go beyond being an offspring of God to become a son of God with the same love of truth and righteousness that he has.

And as sons of God, there are no spiritual distinctions among us. We are all spiritual brothers of each other, regardless of our nationality or status in the world. We are members of the body of Christ, he who is the all and in all. He is the all because he made the world, and he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is in all because he holds all things together. Remember what Paul said about him earlier in this book: **“And he is before all, and in him all things hold together”** (Colossians 1:17).

According to my Bible dictionary, the word Scythian was a general term for the savage and uncivilized. A barbarian was any Gentile who did not speak the Greek language, which was the international language of that age.

## As chosen men of God put on all goodness

- **Put on therefore, as chosen men of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing each other, and forgiving yourselves, if any man has a complaint against any, just as also the Christ forgave you, so also ye, and above all these things, love, which is the bond of perfection** (Colossians 3:12-14).

God chose us because of the character of our spirit. We are chosen men of God because we are humble, open minded, and love truth and righteousness. For he opens the eyes of all men to believe his Son Jesus Christ who are humble, open minded, and love truth and righteousness. In that way we are chosen men of God. That also makes us holy and beloved. We are holy because he has purified our souls. And we are beloved because we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

Paul also said, that as chosen men of God, we should put on

bowels of compassion  
 kindness  
 humility  
 meekness  
 longsuffering

forbear each other  
 forgive yourselves  
 and above all these things, love

In Paul's letter to the disciples at Galatia he lists nine examples of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), four of which are in the above list: kindness, meekness, longsuffering, and love. I reproduce here what I said there about those fruits of the Spirit.

Regarding bowels of compassion, remember, as the heart symbolizes our intellect, so our bowels symbolize our feelings. Therefore, when we put on bowels of compassion, it means having feelings of compassion toward each other. Having compassion means having strong sympathy for those who are suffering. It means sorrowing with them. For Paul said, **"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ..."** (Romans 12:15).

Kindness is another fruit of the Spirit. The word kindness occurs two hundred and fourteen times in the Bible. One hundred and sixty four of those times the word is combined with the word loving to say loving kindness, almost all of which refer to God. He is kind beyond measure toward us, and it is loving kindness. We owe our very existence to his kindness. And every blessing we enjoy is a result of his loving kindness, although few people appreciate it.

The Psalms are filled with expressions of God's loving kindness. Psalm 107 begins by saying, **"O give thanks to Jehovah, For he is good, for his loving kindness is forever"** (Psalm 107:1). And four times in that psalm it says, **"O that men would praise Jehovah for his loving kindness, and for his wonderful works to the sons of men!"** (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31). Therefore, as sons of God we too must show kindness, for it is one of the fruits of the Spirit of God.

Humility refers to having a realistic assessment of yourself. Having too high an assessment of yourself is called pride. Having too low an assessment of yourself is called a broken spirit. What God want is for us to have an accurate view of ourselves, having the right kind of self love, with neither too much nor too little.

Meekness is another of the fruits of the Spirit. Meekness is having patience and being gentle and kind. Do not confuse it with cowardice. God condemns cowards (see Revelation 21:8). Meekness is a balance between aggressiveness and cowardice. A man can be meek, yet very courageous. A man can be meek, yet very strong.

Remember what Jesus said about the meek: **"Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth"** (Matthew 5:5). Indeed, Jesus said that he himself was meek: **"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 11:29-30).

Longsuffering is another great virtue, being a fruit of the Spirit of God. God is longsuffering because he wants to save our souls. For Paul said, **"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). Therefore, we are commanded to be longsuffering toward each other.

We are also commanded to be longsuffering toward our sufferings, which we experience as we strive to live righteously in this sinful world. As the book of Hebrews says, **“And we earnestly desire each of you to show the same diligence toward the full assurance of the hope until the end, so that ye may not become lazy, but imitators of those who, through faith and longsuffering, inherit the promises”** (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Forbearance means to endure and tolerate. Forbearance is a necessary part of rearing children, because they make many mistakes and do many foolish things while they are developing. And it would be wrong to punish every little infraction. Likewise we should forbear each other while we are developing in spirit. For we all begin as newborn babes in Christ. Peter spoke of that when he said, **“... 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 2:2-3).

Likewise we should forgive ourselves if any man has a complaint against any. We should forgive ourselves as the Christ forgave us. Forgiveness is a wonderful quality of our Savior. However, the idea of forgiveness is greatly misunderstood by this permissive generation. They insist that we forgive every violation against us, and forgive unconditionally. God never forgives that way. He always includes some kind punishment with it.

Remember the example of Moses, who was punished by not being permitted to enter the promised land. The passage says, **“And I [Moses] 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 forgave Moses and later took him into heaven, but he would not remove his punishment on the earth. And if God would not remove punishment for Moses, how can men demand we give them unconditional forgiveness?

Paul concluded his list by saying that above all those things, as chosen men of God, we should put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Love, genuine love, binds us together in the one body of Christ. Love is the bond of perfection. Indeed, perfection cannot occur without love. Love is what binds things together to make them perfect.

A lack of love, love for God and love for each other, is the cause of all suffering, sorrow, and death. And no man will ever see God who does not have love for him and his children, the disciples of Christ.

**Let the peace of God prevail in your hearts**

- **And let the peace of God prevail in your hearts, for which also ye were called in one body, and become thankful** (Colossians 3:15).

Peace is the freedom from disturbance. Therefore, having the peace of God prevail in our hearts gives us inner serenity and calmness. The peace of God should always prevail in our hearts, regardless of the trials and tribulations we face in this life. We were called by the Lord to have his peace prevail in our hearts.

Jesus said to his apostles at the time of last supper, **“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). He also said to them, **“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).

Paul said we should let the peace of God prevail in our hearts because we were called in one body, the body of Christ, the church. And that peace should certainly prevail among us. And it will prevail if we love each other, because our love for each other is a mark of our genuineness in Christ. For Jesus also said to his apostles, **“By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other”** (John 13:35).

Paul added that we should also become thankful. Gratitude is another important virtue that we should have, especially thankfulness to God. Always be careful to show your gratitude whenever it is deserving.

## Teach and admonish yourselves

- **Let the word of Christ dwell in you abundantly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing by grace in your hearts to God** (Colossians 3:16).

That is a clear command to study the words of the New Testament, because that is the source of the word of Christ. It is exceedingly important that the word of Christ dwell in us abundantly, because the primary reason for all the disunity among believers is their ignorance of what is taught in the New Testament. The Catholic Church actively discourages its members from reading the New Testament. That way they can perpetrate all their errors.

Paul also said the word of Christ should dwell in us abundantly in all wisdom. It is very important not only to know the word of Christ from the New Testament, but to know it with wisdom. Although many believers know things about the teachings of the New Testament, they misinterpret and misapply what it says. That is where wisdom is needed. And that comes from (1) regular and careful study of the New Testament, (2) an open mind that is undistorted by false teachings, and (3) an eagerness to know the truth with the humility to accept it.

After commanding us about the word of Christ, Paul commanded us to teach and admonish each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. From those words, a strict legalist could argue that the only way we should teach and admonish each other is in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, because that is how Paul told us to teach and admonish each other.

I have never heard any man make such an argument. However, there are many Christians who use those words in a legalistic way to argue against using any kind of musical instru-

ment while singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They claim that Paul commanded us to sing. He did not say anything about playing an instrument. Hence, they conclude that all instruments are forbidden.

Although I honor their practice of excluding instruments when they sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, I do not honor their condemnation of those who do. Their argument is just as unwise as the one about teaching and admonishing with only psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. What makes the use of musical instruments wrong is their abuse, such as being so loud that the singing is in the background and not in the foreground where it belongs. For the purpose of our singing is to teach and admonish each other. Actually, the melody of a song itself, even without instruments, will sometimes distract from that purpose. Therefore, it is important to be frequently reminded of the purpose of singing.

Notice how Paul also said that we should sing by grace in our hearts to God. Grace in this sense refers to that which is right and lovely. Hence, we should teach and admonish each other, singing by what is right and lovely in our hearts to God.

Regarding our words and our heart, remember how Jesus rebuked the scholars and Pharisees, when he said, **“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).

## Do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus

- **And all things, anything whatever ye may do in word or in deed, do all in the name of Lord Jesus, expressing thanks to the God and Father through him** (Colossians 3:17).

Doing everything in the name of Lord Jesus means representing him in everything about our lives. Remember, Paul said about Christ that **“we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30). Therefore, whatever we do in word or in deed is acting for him. And remember what Paul said about himself: **“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And what I now live in flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me”** (Galatians 2:20). And we too must no longer live independent of Christ, but do everything in his name.

Moreover, when we express thanks to the God and Father it must be through Christ. He is our mediator between us and God. Therefore, we must always approach God through Christ, including whenever we express thanks to him.

## Wives and husbands

- **Wives, be ye submissive to your own husbands as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love the wives and do not be made bitter against them** (Colossians 3:18-19).

Here and in the next few passages Paul gives instructions about the relationship between (1) wives and husbands, (2) children and fathers, and (3) bondmen and masters.

Paul said it is proper in the Lord that wives are to be submissive to their own husbands. The modern world does not live in the Lord, and they hate commandments like that. Therefore, our rulers have even made laws against requiring wives to be submissive to their own husbands. They have robbed husbands of their God-given right for their wives to be submissive to them. That is a major reason marriage in America is now a high-risk venture, and fewer people are marrying and the country is becoming a nation of bastards. Of course, wives are not commanded to submit to sinful things that their husbands may demand of them.

Although wives are to be submissive to their own husbands in the Lord, the husbands are to love their wives, and are not to be made bitter against them. The failure of husbands to love their wives is another major reason why marriage in America is failing.

There is in the Bible a model marriage that can help husbands and wives live right in the Lord toward each other. However, the book about that model marriage is in very figurative language. It is called Song of Solomon (also called Canticles), and because it is so figurative I recommend you read my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*, in which I explain its meaning and how it can help husbands and wives love each other as God would have them.

The book Song of Solomon will teach you how to relate to each other. But the chapter in my book about it will make it easier for you to understand and apply its lessons, just as this commentary will help you with the New Testament.

## Children and fathers

- **Children, obey the parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so that they may not be discouraged (Colossians 3:20-21).**

It is very important for children to obey the parents in all things. It is well-pleasing in the Lord because their obedience is beneficial for both children and parents. Disobedient children are a great grievance and burden to parents. Disobedience to them weakens the family. It weakens the reputation of fathers and mothers; it undermines the financial security of the family; and it challenges the mental health of them all. It makes everyone unhappy, including the children themselves. Of course, if children have wicked parents then they should not obey their wickedness.

Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, was obedience to his parents when he was a child. For example, when he was twelve years old, his parents mistakenly departed Jerusalem in the caravan without him. After going back to Jerusalem they found him in the temple.

The record then says, **“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. And he**

**went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was being subordinate to them”** (Luke 2:48-51).

Paul also commanded fathers to not provoke their children. Fathers have great power over their children, and there can be the temptation to abuse that power. Fathers can provoke their children in many ways, and because their children are under their authority, and are so much weaker they can become discouraged.

Fathers sometimes do not realize how important it is to a child that his father be pleased with him. And not seeing that can also cause a child to become discouraged. Also virtually anything that is seen as unjust will cause them to become discouraged. Righteous fathers should always be alert so they do not discourage their children.

## Bondmen

- **Bondmen, obey in all things those masters according to flesh, not in eye-service as men-pleasers, but in simplicity of heart, fearing God** (Colossians 3:22).

Masters according to flesh refer to earthly masters, in contrast with our Master in heaven. Paul’s admonition here to bondmen applies to every man being employed by someone else. We should perform our service to them in simplicity of heart. That means to serve them genuinely and without having any kind of hidden agendas or ulterior motives.

We should not serve our employers in eye-service as men-pleasers. Obeying them in eye-service means doing only what makes them think you are being obedient so they will be pleased with you. It means obeying as little as possible, while still satisfying your employer. I have seen examples of when indolent workmen suddenly become very active when the foreman begins watching them. That is not how we should obey our masters.

We should obey them genuinely in simplicity of heart, fearing God knowing that he is always watching us. Knowing that God is always watching us and holding us accountable is part of fearing him. And that helps us resist temptations and live righteously.

## In everything work from soul as to the Lord

- **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).

Working from soul means being industrious, and that is a much desired virtue of all men. There are countless occupations that men and women engage in. And every one of them not involving anything sinful should be considered working as to the Lord. Therefore, as disciples of Christ we should always have the reputation of being industrious in whatever service we perform because we know that we are working as to the Lord and not to men. That will not only please men, but it will be pleasing to God and bring glory to him.

We should be industrious in whatever we may do, working from soul as to the Lord, because we know that from the Lord we will receive the reward of the inheritance. Our

inheritance is glory in heaven as sons of God for eternity, of which there is no greater reward.

I will also say that working from soul as to the Lord and not to men can even become self-rewarding. That means a habit will develop in you so that eventually there will be pleasure in working industriously. There are numerous examples in the world of men who have come to love their labor because they had worked industriously. Their labor itself becomes self-rewarding.

## Recompense without partiality

- **And he who does wrong will be recompensed what he did wrong, and there is no partiality** (Colossians 3:25).

What few men realize is that they are going to be held accountable to God for everything they did wrong. They do not realize that just because they may escape proper sanctions in the world, they will not escape in the great day of judgment. Indeed, 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).

How that will be done is not told. However, I have conjectured about it in the appendix of my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. I base much of my conjectures about it on this passage: **“Be agreeing with thine opponent quickly, while thou art with him on the way, lest the opponent deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the subordinate, and thou wilt be cast into prison. Truly I say to thee, thou wilt, no, not come out from there, until thou have paid the last quadrans”** (Matthew 5:25-26).

God is completely impartial toward every soul. He is not even partial to his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus has become Lord of all because he earned it, proving himself superior to everyone else by his perfect life of obedience to God here upon the earth.

Not only will sinners be recompensed for what they do wrong, but as disciples of Christ we will also be recompensed for our wrongs. 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. Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? And if ye are without chastening, of which all have become participants, then ye are bastards, and not sons.**

**“Besides, we indeed have had chastisers—the fathers of our flesh—and we were turned around. Shall we not much more be subordinate to the Father of the spirits, and we will live? For those men indeed for a few days chastened us according to that which seemed good to them, but he for that which is advantageous, in order to be partakers of his holiness. But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:5-11).

## Masters and bondmen

- **Masters, present to the bondmen what is right and equitable, knowing that ye also have a Master in heavens** (Colossians 4:1).

A master is another kind of ruler. Rulers generally have authority over the citizenry in matters of government. Masters generally have authority over particular individuals. Therefore, Paul commanded masters to present to the bondmen under their authority what is right and equitable. God is always just, because justice is the foundation of his throne (see Psalm 97:2). And he wants us to always be just, regardless of our authority.

Paul reminded masters that they too have a Master in heavens: Almighty God himself. Therefore, they must present to their bondmen what is right and equitable. Otherwise, what God said would happen to the ancient nation of Edom will happen to them: **“As thou have done, it shall be done to thee. Thy dealing shall return upon thine own head”** (Obadiah 1:15).

## Continue in prayer

- **Continue in prayer, being vigilant in it with thankfulness** (Colossians 4:2).

Continuing in prayer means to continually keep God in your mind, even if only in the background of your thinking. Develop that habit. Be vigilant and watchful that you always have him in your thoughts so that you always ask him to be with you in whatever you do, and that you are always thankful to him for whatever happens; remembering 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).

## Pray also for Paul

- **Praying simultaneously about us also, so that God may open to us a door of the word, to speak the mystery of the Christ, because of which I have also been bound, so that I may make it known as I ought to speak** (Colossians 4:3-4).

Asking God to open to Paul and his co-workmen a door of the word means to provide them with opportunities to proclaim the good news of Christ, and speak the mystery of the Christ. The mystery of the Christ is how he was able to redeem our souls from the condemnation of our sins and enable us to become children of God.

Before Christ came into the world that was a great mystery. For if God saved us arbitrarily, that would have made him unjust, unless he saved all who hate him as well, including the devil and the demons. His only begotten Son Jesus Christ was the answer to that dilemma. For Jesus came into this world, lived fully as a man in the flesh, proved his moral and spiritual superiority, proved that sin is not inevitable, and earned the right to redeem from the condemnation of their sins the souls of all who belong to him.

Paul says that he was bound, and the reason was because he was speaking the mystery of the Christ and his good news of salvation for us. No details about Paul's bondage are

given, although most people believe he is referring to his bondage at Rome. No details are given because such things are not important for us to know.

Paul said he wanted to make it known as he ought to speak. Knowledge of the good news of Christ is a great treasure, which Christ had given to Paul and the other apostles to share with the world. Therefore, Paul wanted God to open a door of the word for them to speak it. We should all speak the word whenever God opens to us a door of it.

## Walk in wisdom toward those outside

- **Walk in wisdom toward those outside, redeeming the time, your speech always with grace, seasoned with salt, to know how it is fitting for you to answer each one** (Colossians 4:5-6).

Walking in wisdom toward those outside means acting wisely in the greater world of unbelievers. Acting unwisely not only undermines our efforts to evangelize, but it brings reproach to Christ. It turns people away from his good news, and gives his enemies opportunity to scoff and deride him. Therefore, we must be very careful to always walk in wisdom toward them. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“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).

Redeeming the time refers to using the time we have remaining in our lives wisely. Peter spoke of that, when he said, **“Therefore of Christ having suffered in flesh for us, arm ye yourselves also with the same mentality, because he who has suffered in flesh has ceased from sin, in order to live the remaining time in flesh, no longer by lusts of men, but by the will of God. 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”** (First Peter 4:1-3).

As children of God our speech must always be with grace, seasoned with salt, to know how it is fitting for us to answer each one. Foolish and filthy speech should never come out of our mouths. Indeed, we should continually purge even the thought of such things. Our speech must always be with grace. We should season it with the figurative salt, because that makes it more pleasing and helpful.

Solomon told about the value of good speech. Here are some examples of what he said:

**The mouth of a righteous man is a fountain of life ...** (Proverbs 10:11).

**The lips of a righteous man feed many ...** (Proverbs 10:21).

**A word fitly spoken is apples of gold in a network of silver** (Proverbs 25:11).

## Tychicus will inform you about me

- **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).

I speak about Tychicus in my commentary of the book of Ephesians where Paul said Tychicus was a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord (see Ephesians 6:21). In both books Paul said he was a beloved brother, but here Paul also said he was a fellow bondman in the Lord. That suggests perhaps Tychicus had developed beyond being a helper to a fellow bondman with Paul. But that is just a conjecture; that difference may have no significance.

Paul said he was sending Tychicus so that (1) he may know the things about the disciples at Colossae, and (2) he may encourage their hearts. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul also said he was sending Tychicus to encourage their hearts. But instead of Tychicus learning things about them, he was sent to make them known things about Paul and his fellow workmen. Instead of gathering information as here, Tychicus was giving information there.

People who love each other want to knowing about each other, especially when they are apart. And the beloved brother Tychicus served an important role in sharing that information between Paul and the congregations. It is not only pleasant to know about those we love, but it is important so that we can quickly come to their aid when needed. It is also important so that we can encourage each other.

### Three fellow workmen from the Jews

- **Aristarchus my fellow prisoner salutes you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom ye received orders, if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus, these being the only fellow workmen from the circumcision for the kingdom of God, men who became a comfort to me** (Colossians 4:10-11).

Paul named three men who saluted them. He said they were his only fellow workmen for the kingdom of God who were also Jews. He identified them as Jews because he said they were from the circumcision. God had commanded that Abraham their founding father be circumcised, he and all his descendants, as a sign they belonged to him, a personal and private reminder for each man (and each mother of a son).

Paul said those three men became a comfort to him. Jesus sent Paul out as his apostle to the Gentiles. Hence, he spent most of his work in foreign lands among foreign people. Many of those Gentiles became faithful disciples of Christ and spiritual brothers with Paul. And the record shows how strong was their love for Paul and his love for them. Nevertheless, Paul had great affection for his fellow Jews, and was deeply disappointed that they rejected Christ. Therefore, it was comforting to him to have those three fellow Jews work with him as faithful disciples.

Regarding Aristarchus, he is mentioned in four other passages of the Bible:

**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).

**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. These men, who went ahead, awaited us at Troas (Acts 20:4-5).**

**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).**

**Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes thee, and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my co-workmen (Philemon 1:23-24).**

Regarding Mark, he and Barnabas went with Paul on their first missionary journey. However, Mark departed from them not long after they began. Paul then refused to have Mark go with him and Barnabas on a second journey. That caused Paul and Barnabas to separate (see Acts 15:37-40).

Nevertheless, Paul still had good feelings toward Mark, and considered him useful. For he told the Colossians to welcome him if he came to them. Paul also said in his second letter to Timothy, **“Only Luke is with me. Having taken Mark, bring him with thee, for he is useful to me for service”** (Second Timothy 4:11).

Regarding the man called Justus, Paul said his name was Jesus. The name Jesus was a common one among the Jews. In the Hebrew Old Testament the Greek word for Jesus is transliterated Joshua. Joshua was the name of the man who led the sons of Israel into their promised land. However, there were other men named Joshua in the Old Testament. Therefore, it too was a common name.

The man Paul mentioned who was named Jesus may have preferred to be called Justus because of respect for the name of our Savior. Men named Justus are mentioned in two other passages of the New Testament:

**And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias (Acts 1:23).**

**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 (Acts 18:7).**

## Saluting and being saluted

- **Epaphras, the bondman of Christ from you, salutes you, always striving for you in prayers, so that ye may stand perfect and made full in all the will of God. For I testify about him, that he has much zeal for you, and those in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas salute you. Salute the brothers in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the assembly associated with his house (Colossians 4:12-15).**

Paul mentioned Epaphras near the beginning of this book, and spoke well of him: **“Just as ye learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow bondman, who is a faithful helper**

**of the Christ for you, the man who also made clear to us your love in spirit”** (Colossians 1:7-8). Laodicea and Hierapolis were a few miles north of Colossae.

Epaphras is only mentioned in one other passage of the Bible: **“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes thee, and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my co-workmen”** (Philemon 1:23-24).

Luke was a frequent traveling companion with Paul. And remember, Luke not only wrote one of the four biographies of Jesus, but he also wrote the book of Acts, which gives the history of the early church. Nevertheless, Luke is only mentioned in two other passages of the Bible. One of them is in the above quotation from Philemon. The other one is in a passage that also mentions Mark: **“Only Luke is with me. Having taken Mark, bring him with thee, for he is useful to me for service”** (Second Timothy 4:11).

Regarding Demas, he is also mentioned with Mark and Luke in the above quotation from Philemon. He is mentioned on one other passage in Paul’s second letter to Timothy: **“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”** (Second Timothy 4:9-10). That passage tells how Demas forsook Paul for an evil reason: because he loved the present age. Not every fellow workman of Paul remained faithful.

Nymphas is only mentioned here near the end of the book of Colossians. Therefore, we know nothing about him except that an assembly of disciples was associated with his house. Most of the early congregations met in houses. It was only later that they became like the synagogues, having special buildings for their meetings.

## Reading the letters

- **And when the letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the congregation of Laodiceans, and that ye also read the one from Laodicea** (Colossians 4:16).

Nine of Paul’s thirteen books in the New Testament were written to congregations. And because they contained mostly instructions about how to live as disciples of Christ, those letters were copied and shared among the congregations. Remember, all of the books of the New Testament had not yet been written and assembled together until after the death of Paul.

Paul commanded those disciples to read those particular letters. And we are commanded to read all of the books of the New Testament. For it is only there that we can find the word of God for us.

Regarding the letter from Laodicea, such a letter has never been found. Many of the documents of the ancient church were destroyed by the Romans during times of severe persecution. God preserved for us the ones we have now in the New Testament. And they are sufficient for us.

## To Archippus

- **And say to Archippus, Watch the ministry that thou received in the Lord so that thou may fulfill it** (Colossians 4:17).

There is one other passage in the Bible that mentions Archippus: **“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and co-workman, and to the beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the congregation at thy house”** (Philemon 1:1-2).

As with Nymphas, a congregation met at the house of Archippus. The ministry that Paul said Archippus received in the Lord is not explained. A ministry is simply a process of serving or administering. It is not a special office of the church. Unlike the offices of elder (or overseer) and helper (or deacon), the New Testament gives no instructions about an office of minister. Indeed, besides the office of apostle, there are no instructions about any other offices except elder and helper.

Nevertheless, there are many ministries and services for Christ that we can perform. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, when he began listing various gifts of the Holy Spirit, he first 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”** (First Corinthians 12:4-6).

Having a particular gift of the Holy Spirit was not an office. Providing a special service for the disciples was not an office. Performing some kind of function in the church was not an office. And neither is having some kind of ministry an office. Yet like the office of Bishop, men have created an office of Pastor and an office of Minister, and have added them to the doctrine of Christ. Nevertheless, they are not legitimate offices. For only the authority of the scriptures must be used for the doctrine of Christ.

## Paul’s farewell

- **The salutation of Paul by my hand. Remember my bonds. Grace is with you. Truly** (Colossians 4:18).

As indicated at the beginning of his letter, Timothy probably transcribed the words of it. However, in these last words of it Paul said he wrote that concluding salutation himself. It was to them like a signature is to us. And Paul asked that they remember his bonds. He had early asked for their prayers, and told them why he was in bondage: **“Praying simultaneously about us also, so that God may open to us a door of the word, to speak the mystery of the Christ, because of which I have also been bound, so that I may make it known as I ought to speak”** (Colossians 4:3-4).

And as with several of his letters, Paul said that grace was with them. He was, of course, speaking of the grace of God our Father in heaven.

# A Commentary on The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

## The greeting

- **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the congregation of Thessalonians in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ** (First Thessalonians 1:1).

Timothy was probably the most active helper of Paul. For two of his letters we have in the New Testament were addressed to Timothy. Regarding Silvanus, remember that was probably the longer name of Silas, a man who was a companion with Paul during his second missionary journey. I wrote more about him in my commentary on Second Corinthians (see 1:19).

Thessalonica was a seaport city in Macedonia. It was between Philippi and Corinth. Paul went there during his second missionary journey after first going to Philippi. And after being at Thessalonica Paul then went to Athens and Corinth.

As Paul did in all of his letters, he began with a greeting of grace and peace to them from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says the letter is from him, Silvanus, and Timothy. However, as with all of his letters, there is no doubt that the words are those of the apostle Paul. One of those two men probably transcribed the letter for him, or perhaps they both did. Remember, Tertius said he transcribed Paul's letter to the Romans: **"I Tertius, the man who transcribed the letter, salute you in the Lord"** (Romans 16:22). Silvanus and Timothy were both active in evangelizing with Paul in that region.

## Thanking God for all of them

- **We thank God always about all of you, making recollection of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father** (First Thessalonians 1:2-3).

After calling for a blessing of grace and peace to them from God and Christ, Paul said they thanked God always about all of the disciples at Thessalonica. He wanted them to know that he and those with him continually expressed their thanks to God for them. That is a very strong compliment he made to them. Any congregation of Christ would be honored to have Paul and his co-workmen thank God always about them.

Paul also said they made recollection of them in their prayers. To recall someone in your prayers indicates love for them. It shows a desire for them to be blessed and protected. When Paul said they remembered without ceasing, that does not mean being always in their conscious thoughts. For nobody keeps everything about those they love in their conscious thoughts. What Paul meant was that they never forgot. They never forgot

their work of faith

their labor of love

their steadfastness of hope

Paul uses the expression “without ceasing” three times in this book. And those are the only times it is used in the entire Bible.

The expression “work of faith” is also contained in the second letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“For which also we pray always about you, so that our God will make you worthy of the calling, and will fulfill every desire of goodness and work of faith with power”** (Second Thessalonians 1:11). And it is found nowhere else in the Bible.

People work for many reasons. A work of faith is labor performed because of faith. The faith we have in Christ as his disciples helps motivate us to work to promote his truth and righteousness. That is work of faith, faith in our Lord and Savior.

The expression labor of love is found in one other book of the Bible: **“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the labor of love that ye showed toward his name, having served the sanctified, and who are serving”** (Hebrews 6:10). As with a work of faith, a labor of love is work performed because of love. And just as we have faith in Christ, so also we have love for him. And that love also helps motivate us to promote his truth and righteousness.

The expression steadfastness of hope only occurs here in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. Our hope is in our Lord Jesus Christ that we will be resurrected with him. And the steadfastness of that hope is vital for us. For without it we have no incentive to believe in him. As 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). Therefore, be steadfast in your hope because God promised that it will be fulfilled.

## The good news is not in word only

- **Knowing, beloved brothers, your selection by God, because the good news from us happened to you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as ye know what kind of men we became among you, because of you** (First Thessalonians 1:4-5).

We have all been selected by God because we are the sheep of Christ. The sheep of Christ are identified by the character of their spirit. They are the men who believe in him. For Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, **“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”** (John 10:26-27).

And men who believe in Christ, the true Christ, are those who are humble in spirit, who love truth and righteousness, and who are open minded to learn. Those who are proud in spirit, who hate truth and righteousness, and who are closed minded to learn are not the sheep of Christ. Therefore, they do not believe him.

That is how God selects us. He selects all whom he has not blinded and hardened. For the apostle John said, **“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).

God blinds the eyes and hardens the heart of all who are not the sheep of Christ. Nevertheless, each man chooses for himself whether he will be a sheep of Christ or not. Every man chooses for himself whether he will love truth and righteousness or not, whether he will be humble in spirit or not, whether he will be open minded to learn or not.

Paul said the good news from them happened to the Thessalonians not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. Hence, the good news of Christ happened to them

in word  
in power  
in the Holy Spirit  
in much assurance.

The word of the good news was first preached to men by Paul and the other apostles. We now have that word recorded for us in the New Testament of the Holy Bible. Paul said the good news also happened to them in power. That refers to the signs and wonders and miracles that the apostles were able to perform as proof of the good news of Christ.

The good news happening to them in the Holy Spirit probably refers to the special gifts of the Holy Spirit they received as disciples of Christ. Paul described those gifts in his first letter to the Corinthians (see First Corinthians 12).

When Paul said the good news happened to them in much assurance that was probably a summary of all the ways the good news happened to them: in word, in power, and in the Holy Spirit. Each one of those gave them assurance of the authenticity of the good news of Christ. Therefore, all of them together gave them much assurance.

Paul reminded them of what kind of men he and his co-workmen became among them. That probably means they humbled themselves to become a part of the Thessalonians, and they did it for their sake.

Remember how Paul said he became all things to all men: **“For although being free from all men, I made myself a bondman to all, so that I might gain the more. 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 9:19-22).

**Ye became examples to all who believe**

- **And ye became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, in order for you to become**

**examples to all those who believe, in Macedonia and in Achaia (First Thessalonians 1:6-7).**

And when Paul and his co-workmen became that way among them, then the Thessalonians became imitators of them and of the Lord. The Thessalonians became imitators of them by repenting of their sins and living according to the will of God. To imitate means to act the same way.

Paul and his co-workmen had imitated Christ, and the Thessalonians had imitated Paul and his co-workmen. In the same way, we should all imitate men like Paul who had imitated Christ. By imitating each other as we all imitate Christ, the good news will be spread abroad. Our imitation is not about specific individual things, but about all following the will of God as revealed to us in the Holy Bible.

Paul said the brothers at Thessalonica had received the word in much affliction, but nevertheless with joy of the Holy Spirit. That affliction was caused by persecution. The book of acts describes some of it in this passage: **“Now after passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they [Paul and Silas] 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.**

**“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. And the brothers straightaway sent both Paul and Silas away through the night to Berea ...”** (Acts 17:1-10). Although Paul and Silas fled that persecution, there is no doubt the disciples of Thessalonica were still subject to persecutions because they believed in Christ.

Paul added, that although the disciples of Thessalonica received the word in much affliction, they still received it with joy of the Holy Spirit. Joy of the Holy Spirit means joy from the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Thessalonians received the word of God in much affliction, but still with joy from the Holy Spirit. God has ways to give us joy even with our afflictions.

Becoming imitators of the Lord, and receiving the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, enabled them to become examples to all who believe, both in Macedonia and Achaia. Our lives can become examples for others when we live right even in affliction.

And that is what happened to the disciples at Thessalonica. They became examples to all those in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

Remember, Philippi and Thessalonica were both in the province of Macedonia. Athens and Corinth were both in the province of Achaia, which was south of the border of Macedonia.

## The word of the Lord sounded forth from them

- **For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything** (First Thessalonians 1:8)

When Paul said the word of the Lord had sounded forth from them, it means people heard about the word of the Lord when they learned that the Thessalonians had received it. Their simple acceptance of the good news of Christ brought awareness of the word of the Lord to many places beyond them, even to places beyond Macedonia and Achaia. Interesting information about things happening in one place commonly spreads out to many other places.

Paul said the word of the Lord sounded forth in every place their faith toward God went forth. In other words, the spreading information about the faith of the Thessalonians also caused knowledge of the word of the Lord to spread, to sound forth.

Hence, Paul and his co-workmen did not need to introduce the word of the Lord where it had spread forth that way. People already heard about it. All they needed was to have it proclaimed more fully to them. When Paul said they had no need to say anything, he simply meant they did not need to explain who they were and tell them there was such a thing as the word of the Lord.

Consider this example of not knowing about the existence of something: **“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”** (Acts 19:1-2).

Therefore, the faith of the Thessalonians provided a wonderful service by spreading awareness of the word of God. That made it easier to teach those who became aware of it.

## Ye turned to God from the idols

- **For they report about us what kind of entrance we had with you, and how ye turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens whom he raised from the dead—Jesus—who rescues us from the coming wrath** (First Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Paul said the information that sounded forth from them included what kind of entrance they (Paul and Silas) had with them, and how they turned to God from the idols. What Paul meant by entrance was their first coming to Thessalonica with the good news of Christ. As the passage in Acts described, Paul and Silas first went to the synagogue to tell

about Christ and his good news of our salvation (see Acts 17:1-10). That description tells how the Thessalonians turned to God from the idols.

They not only turned from the idols but they turned to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens. Idols are dead objects cleverly fashioned to appear as living things. They are useless and helpless because they are not gods but lifeless objects. The Thessalonians turned away from those things. And instead chose to serve a living and true God, our Father in the heavens.

And part of our service to him is to await his Son from the heavens. Paul explains farther in this letter how Jesus is going to return from heaven to take us all with him. God raised Jesus from the dead, and he is also going to raise us (our divine spirit) from the dead (our flesh) to rescue us from the coming wrath.

The coming wrath is the end of the world, the final judgment and the casting of sinners into hell, the lake of fire that burns forever. By our believing in Christ and serving God he will rescue us from that wrath. It is wrath because sinners create evils that bring sorrow, destruction, and death, thus arousing the wrath of a just God against them. For what man who loves truth and righteousness would not be angry against those who create sorrow, destruction and death? Sinners deserve to suffer the wrath of God.

### Paul's entrance with them was not empty

- **For ye yourselves know, brothers, our entrance with you, that it has not become empty. But having suffered before and been mistreated in Philippi, as ye know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the good news of God within much conflict** (First Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica from Philippi where they were beaten and cast into prison (see Acts 16:11-17:1). Although they were severely mistreated in Philippi, that did not stop them from evangelizing in Thessalonica. And as Paul said, their first efforts there did not become empty. They remained bold in our God to speak to them the good news of God, even though it was within much conflict.

Virtually everywhere that Paul went to preach Christ there was conflict. Remember however, at the beginning Jesus told Paul he would suffer many things for the name of Christ: **“For I will give him a glimpse of how many things it is necessary for him to suffer for my name”** (Acts 9:16).

### Speaking truth, not as pleasing men

- **For our exhortation is not from error, nor from uncleanness, nor in deception, but as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the good news, thus we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who proves our hearts** (First Thessalonians 2:3-4).

To exhort is to urge earnestly. And that is how Paul and his co-workmen preached the good news of Christ. It was from exhortation—earnest pleading—because it concerns the

salvation of our eternal souls. Every effort of evangelism should be an exhortation. The lost of the world need to know the perils of ignoring and rejecting the good news of Christ.

For the good news of our salvation is the truth from God and about accepting his Son Jesus Christ. It is not from error. It is from God himself. Nor is it from uncleanness. It is from holiness. Everything about the good news of Christ is pure and wholesome. Everything about it is for building up and promoting life.

Nor is it in deception. Everything about the good news of Christ is true and right. The Lord God proved that with the many signs and wonders that first accompanied it. We who promote the good news of Christ do not lie. We do not use any kind of deception, not only because we do not need it, but because deception is completely incompatible with Christ and his good news.

Paul and the other apostles had been approved by God to be entrusted with the good news. They proved themselves worthy of that trust. And being entrusted with the good news, they proclaimed it faithfully in their speech and in their writings. And thanks to God for their faithfulness, we now have the complete record of the good news of Christ available for us in the Holy Bible.

The good news of Christ that they spoke and wrote was not to please men, but to please God, who proves our hearts. They were not motivated to please men, which is why they suffered so much persecution. They were motivated to please God because they loved him.

Paul said that God proves our hearts. That means he tests our hearts to validate our genuineness. Indeed, our entire lives here in this sinful world enable God to prove our hearts, to see if we are worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him. Every trial and temptation is a test. Keep that in mind so you will be on guard and will not fail.

## They came honorably

- **For we came neither in word of flattery (at any time as ye know) nor a pretense of greed (God is witness) nor seeking glory from men, neither from you nor from others** (First Thessalonians 2:5-6).

Flattery is not something we as children of God should ever use. Flattery, although seemingly innocent, is a form of deceit that works no good. For Solomon said, **“A lying tongue hates those whom it has wounded, and a flattering mouth works ruin”** (Proverbs 26:28), and, **“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps”** (Proverbs 29:5). Beware of flattery and rebuke it.

A pretense of greed means using deception to mask a motive of greed. The good news of Christ has nothing to do with greed. Nevertheless, there are many hypocrites who claim to promote Christ, but are in fact seeking ways to get money from people. Paul spoke of men who suppose that **“piety to be a means of gain”** (First Timothy 6:5). Paul said to withdraw from such.

Notice how Paul called upon God as the witness that they were not using a pretense of greed. God alone is able to search the hearts of men and know what is in us. As the book

of Jeremiah says, **“I, Jehovah, search the mind. I try the heart, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings”** (Jeremiah 17:10).

Neither did Paul and his co-workmen seek glory from men, not from the Thessalonians nor from others. The desire for glory and popularity is another temptation that has lead many astray. For we cannot be popular with men and still be pleasing to God. As Paul said to the Galatians, **“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). And remember what Jesus said about all men speaking 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).

## Became gentle in the midst of them

- **While able to bear down as apostles of Christ, nevertheless we became gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse cherishes her own children. Thus being desirous of you, we were pleased to impart to you, not only the good news of God, but also our own souls, because ye have become beloved to us** (First Thessalonians 2:6-8).

What Paul meant by bearing down as apostles of Christ, was that they had much authority over them. They could have made heavy demands of them, and they could have chastened every infraction. Remember what Paul did to Elymas the sorcerer who was opposing him: **“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”** (Acts 13:9-11).

Instead, Paul and those with him became gentle toward the Thessalonians, treating them as a nurse cherishes her own children. Using the example of a nurse was a way of telling them they were both gentle and devoted to their care.

When Paul said they were desirous of them, he was referring to their love for them. As he said, the disciples at Thessalonica became beloved to them. Therefore, they were pleased to impart to them, not only the good news of God, but also their own souls. To impart is to share a portion of. And Paul and his co-workmen in Christ shared with them a portion of their own souls.

To share a portion of your soul means to share a part of your life, because your soul is your life. Husbands and wives share a portion of their souls with each other. Fathers and mothers share a portion of their souls with their children. To share a portion of your soul with someone is an expression of the highest form of love. The disciples at Thessalonica had truly become beloved to them.

## Laboring not to burden any of them

- **For ye remember, brothers, our labor and the hardship. For, laboring night and day in order not to burden any of you, we preached to you the good news of God** (First Thessalonians 2:9).

When Paul said they labored night and day in order not to burden any of them, he was referring to financial burdens. Every man has daily needs. We all need to have food to eat, clothing to wear, and a place of rest and shelter. In civilization we all specialize in our labor, so we must ordinarily obtain those things with money, which is a medium of exchange. Using money we trade our labor for the labor that others used to create food, clothing, and places of rest and shelter.

Paul and his co-workmen labored for themselves night and day to provide money for the food, clothing, and place of shelter they needed (although sometimes labor itself can be exchanged for those things). They labored for themselves so they would not be a burden to any of the Thessalonians. Obviously the disciples at Thessalonica were not rich. They had no surplus money they could use to help Paul and his co-workmen supply those needs without it being a burden to them.

That was just another way Paul and his co-workmen demonstrated to the disciples there that they were not greedy, but were genuinely trying to help them. They were trying to help save their souls by preaching the good news of Christ to them. It was also another way to demonstrate the authenticity of their love for them.

## As a father to his own children

- **Ye are witnesses, and God, how piously and justly and blamelessly we became to you who believe, just as ye know, as each one of you as a father of his own children, imploring you, and comforting, and solemnly declaring for you to walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory** (First Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Living piously and justly and blamelessly is a part of being a child of God for all of us. Paul and his co-workmen lived that way, not only to obey God, but also to demonstrate to those who believed that they truly did belong to God.

Paul and his co-workmen let their light shine, as Jesus commanded of us all: **“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 5:14-16).

Paul reminded the disciples at Thessalonica that they themselves had witnessed those things in Paul and his co-workmen. And he added, **“... just as ye know.”** In other words they could have no doubts about it.

Paul said that God also witnessed those things by them. That is the second time in this letter that Paul mentioned God as a witness for them. Since Paul performed signs and wonders to verify that the good news of Christ was from God, those signs and wonders could

also provided evidence that God witnessed how piously and justly and blamelessly Paul and his co-workmen were to the believers there. For God would not have empowered Paul that way unless they were living righteously.

Paul earlier told how they were to those disciples as a nurse cherishing her own children. He now tells how they were to each one of them as a father of his own children. Every righteous father loves his children and wants to do good to them. And part of that is to implore them, and comfort them, and solemnly declare to them to walk worthily of God.

The goal is to walk worthily of God. Loving fathers therefore implore their children to walk worthily of God. They comfort their children to strengthen and encourage them to walk worthily of God. And they solemnly declare to their children to walk worthily of God.

We must all walk worthily of God, because he is calling us into his own kingdom and glory. God is calling us out of this sinful world to be a part of his kingdom and glory. Indeed, he is calling us to be worthy of becoming his sons for eternity in heaven with him, where there is no greater glory.

### They received the word of God

- **And because of this we thank God without ceasing, because, having received the word of God heard from us, ye received not the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe** (First Thessalonians 2:13).

What the Thessalonians heard from Paul and his co-workmen was the word of God, not the word of men. And Paul and his co-workmen thanked God because they received it that way—as being the word of God, and not the word of men. Because of that Paul and his co-workmen thanked God without ceasing.

Thanking God about something without ceasing means to always be grateful to him for it. Paul and his co-workmen had much to be thankful to God, because those Thessalonians received what they heard from them as the genuine word of God. Receiving it that way was encouraging to Paul and his co-workmen. It showed their labors were not in vain. It resulted in lost souls being saved. And it enabled them to establish a new congregation of the Lord having new brothers in Christ, giving them joy like a father and mother has at the birth of a new child.

Paul also mentioned how the word of God that they received was at work in those who believed. The word of God is at work in all who receive it and believe in Christ. Knowledge is a light to guide our way in the darkness of the world. The world is a dark place because we have little awareness of things about it without knowledge. It is a dark place because we know not how to live without knowledge. For there is nobody more blind than those without knowledge.

And knowledge of the word of God is the brightest of all lights in the world to show us its true reality and guide us in the right way. And when knowledge of the word of God is in us as believers, it works in us to enlighten our way and direct our feet along paths of righteousness. Therefore, strive to always have the word of God work in you.

## They also suffered from opposition

- **For ye, brothers, became imitators of the congregations of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus, because ye also suffered the same things by your own countrymen, just as also they by the Jews.**
- **The men who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and who persecuted us, and are not pleasing to God, and are contrary to all men. Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles so that they might be saved, in order to fill up their sins always. But wrath came upon them finally** (First Thessalonians 2:14-16).

Paul said they were imitators of the congregations in Judea. Remember, the church began in Jerusalem of Judea on the day of Pentecost after Christ ascended into heaven. Thus, the congregations of God in Judea were the first ones established. They were also the first ones to suffer persecution because of their faith in Christ. Those first Christians suffered at the hands of their own countrymen, the unbelieving Jews.

Paul said about those Jews,

they killed the Lord Jesus  
 they killed their own prophets  
 they persecuted Paul and his co-workmen  
 they were not pleasing to God  
 they were contrary to all men  
 they forbid speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved

Modern scholars try to defend the Jews by saying Jesus was killed by the Romans. However, the Bible record says differently. The Romans were pressured by the Jews to kill Jesus. The Roman governor Pilate did all he could to dissuade the Jews from wanting to crucify Jesus. Pilate gave the command to crucify Jesus only after the Jews reminded him that Caesar would not be pleased if he spared a man who claimed to be another king. The Romans were merely instruments used by the rulers of the Jews to kill Jesus.

And regarding their own prophets, remember what Stephen said to the rulers of the Jews when he was on trial: **“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 record of Paul’s work that is described in the book of Acts tells of many times when the Jews persecuted Paul. Remember how the Jews persecuted them at Thessalonica (see Acts 17:1-14).

Paul said the Jews were not pleasing to God. They were not pleasing to him because they rejected his Son Jesus Christ. The Jews were not only displeasing to God, but they were contrary to all men. The Jews had a very bad reputation among all the other nations. Indeed, the record tells how they were even expelled from Rome at one time: **“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”** (Acts 18:2).

Moreover, the Jews were not content with rejecting Christ for themselves, but they continually forbid Paul and his co-workmen from speaking about Christ to the Gentiles so they might be saved. The record shows that was the major reason why they persecuted Paul and the other evangelists.

Paul said the opposition of the Jews to the salvation of the Gentiles was for them to fill up their sins always. Not only were the Jews sinful in their rejection of Christ, but their opposition to the salvation of the Gentiles made their sins complete.

And having their sins always filled up meant their condemnation by God was filled up. And their full condemnation meant being totally rejected by God with full punishment. History has shown how God used the Roman army to completely destroy the Jewish nation forty years after Christ began his ministry, leaving only a small remnant.

What Paul meant by wrath coming upon them finally is not clear. Perhaps he meant the impending destruction of their nation. The impending destruction was the climax of God's wrath against them. However, the wrath of God came before that in order to prepare events for that destruction. His wrath always precedes his punishment.

## Being orphaned from them

- **But we, brothers, who were orphaned from you for the time of an hour, in presence not in heart, hastened more earnestly to see your face, with much desire** (First Thessalonians 2:17).

Paul and Silas were forced to flee Thessalonica because the Jews provoked a riot in the city against them. When Paul said they were orphaned from them, that indicates how they felt about their separation. It was like the separation of parents and children, very sorrowful. Paul's use of the word hour was obviously figurative, indicating it was not a long time.

Moreover, he said they were orphaned from them in presence not in heart. It means the memory of the disciples at Thessalonica and their feelings about them remained in their hearts. Paul said that he and his co-workmen hastened more earnestly to see their face, with much desire. Paul earlier spoke of being to them like a nurse to her own children, and like a father to his own children. Here he spoke of being orphaned from them, a form of separation that is indeed very sorrowful. All of those things informed the disciples there about how much love Paul and his co-workmen had for them. And we should have the same kind of love for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Wanting to come to them

- **Therefore we wanted to come to you, indeed I, Paul, even once and again, and Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boast? Or is it not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy** (First Thessalonians 2:18-20).

Paul said he often wanted (once and again) to come to them, but Satan hindered them. How Satan hindered Paul and his co-workmen from coming to them is not told. He was probably hindered by sinful men, although it may have been something else. Satan used evil marauders, stormy weather, and a painful skin disease to afflict Job (see Job 1). However, he first needed God's permission before he could do any of it.

Even though we may be serving God faithfully, he still allows Satan to oppress us in some ways. Remember that when you suffer afflictions. Satan is God's great enemy. And God is giving us the privilege of experiencing the oppressions of his enemy. For as we suffer afflictions from Satan as Christ did, so we will be glorified with Christ.

Paul then said more things to let them know how much he and his co-workmen loved them. What Paul meant by the disciples of Christ being their hope or joy or crown of boast was that the disciples were the fruits of their labors. When a farmer labors he hopes for a good crop, because a good harvest is his joy and crown of boast. He can boast of the success of his labors. And in the same way, the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ was the hope of Paul and his co-workmen. And their successful conversion was their joy and crown of boast, and their glory.

Remember however, what Paul said about them being their hope or joy or crown of boast and their glory was not limited to the congregation at Thessalonica. He was speaking about all of the congregations of Christ. They were their hope or joy or crown of boast and their glory.

Regarding the frequent use of the words we, us, and our in this letter, of the almost seven hundred times that Paul uses the personal pronoun I in his thirteen books, he only uses that word three times in this one. His statement about wanting to come to them is one of them, but even then he combines it with his use of the words we and us. Paul was a humble man who always wanted to be just, giving proper recognition to those who worked with him.

## Paul sent Timothy

- **Therefore, no longer covering over it, we preferred to be left behind in Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother, and a helper of God, and our fellow workman in the good news of the Christ, in order to establish you and to encourage you about your faith, for no man to be disturbed by these afflictions** (First Thessalonians 3:1-3).

Remember, Paul and Silas fled from Thessalonica because the Jews caused a riot against them. They went from Thessalonica to Berea, where Timothy apparently later joined them. However, because the Jews from Thessalonica heard Paul was in Berea, they came there and also agitated the crowds against him. Therefore, the brothers at Berea sent Paul by sea to Athens. Silas apparently remained at Berea, but Timothy was sent to Thessalonica. After preaching in Athens, Paul went to Corinth where Silas and Timothy later joined him.

When the text says **“we preferred to be left behind in Athens alone”** that must refer to a decision Paul and the brothers in Berea made before he departed Berea, because it uses the word we. It was apparently then that they also decided to send Timothy to Thessalonica.

Timothy was sent there to establish those Christians and encourage them in their faith so that none of them would be disturbed by the afflictions they were all suffering. And we too need to help establish and encourage new Christians, especially when they are afflicted and see us afflicted because of the faith. Paul called Timothy

their brother  
 a helper of God,  
 their fellow workman in the good news of the Christ

Timothy may have been the man who brought his letter from Paul to them.

## Paul foretold he would be oppressed

- **For ye yourselves know that we are set for this. For also when we were with you we foretold you that we were going to be oppressed, just as it also happened, and ye know** (First Thessalonians 3:3-4).

Paul reminded the brothers at Thessalonica that he and his co-workmen were going to be oppressed. He said they were set for this. That means oppression is an inevitable consequence of promoting the good news of Christ. And Paul said they warned the Thessalonians beforehand it would happen to them.

Indeed, Paul said to Timothy that every faithful disciple of Christ will be persecuted: **“And also all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and fakers will go forward to worse, leading astray and being led astray”** (Second Timothy 3:12-13). And those who evangelize are often persecuted the most.

## Concerned about their faith

- **Because of this, I too, no longer covering over it, sent in order to know your faith, lest somehow he who tempts was tempting you, and our labor became in vain** (First Thessalonians 3:5).

Using the expression **“no longer covering over it”** means to no longer keep from acting about it. Paul had earlier told how they had sent Timothy to establish them and to encourage them about their faith. He now says “I too” sent in order to know their faith. That suggests Paul may have also sent someone besides Timothy, perhaps while he was in Athens.

Paul was very concerned that those new disciples would be experiencing temptations by he who tempts, which no doubt refers to Satan. Remember, Satan was the original tempter in the garden of Eden. He tempted Jesus while he was upon the earth, and he tempts each one of us as he tries to alienate us from God.

Satan tempts us to turn away from God. And Paul was concerned lest Satan tempt those new disciples at Thessalonica to turn away from God. And if that happened not only would their souls be lost, but all of the labor Paul and his co-workmen had invested in those disciples would have become in vain. It would be to them like the death of a child to its mother.

## Timothy reported good news about them

- **But now of Timothy, having come to us from you, and having proclaimed good news to us of your faith and love, and that ye always have a good recollection of us, longing to see us, just as we also you, because of this, brothers, we were encouraged toward you in all our affliction and necessity through your faith** (First Thessalonians 3:6-7).

Whether Paul sent someone else or not, it was Timothy who returned and reported about them. Timothy proclaim good news to them of their faith and love. In spite of the persecutions, the Thessalonians retained their faith in Christ. With their faith, they no doubt had love for the Lord. But they must have also had love for Paul and his co-workmen, because Timothy reported they always had a good recollection of them, and longed to see them. They longed to see Paul and his co-workmen just as Paul and his co-workmen longed to see them.

Notice how much Paul spoke of the mutual love and affection they had for each other. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“By this all men will know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love among each other”** (John 13:35). We cannot be genuine disciples of Christ and not love each other.

Having heard that good report from Timothy, Paul said they were encouraged toward them. They were encouraged through the faith of the Thessalonians, even in all their affliction and necessity. Paul and his co-workmen not only suffered many afflictions, but they suffered necessities, which means their basic needs were not being fulfilled.

They suffered many different kinds of afflictions. Paul listed many of them in his second letter to the Corinthians (see 11:23-26). He also listed many of their necessities, such as **“frequent sleeplessness, in hunger and thirst, in frequent fasts, in cold and nakedness”** (Second Corinthians 11:27).

## Paul is thankful to God about them

- **Because now we live, if ye stand firm in the Lord. For what thanks can we repay God about you, for all the joy in which we rejoiced because of you before our God, praying night and day above extraordinary in order to see your face and to mend the deficiencies of your faith?** (First Thessalonians 3:8-10).

Paul’s whole life (and those of his co-workmen) was saving the souls of the lost. Therefore, Paul lived because they stood firm in the Lord. He and his co-workmen lived in the sense of fulfilling their mission to save souls. If those disciples failed to stand firm in the Lord, and forsook the good news of Christ, that would be like death to Paul. That seems to be what Paul is telling them. Their firm stand in the Lord was that important to him and to the other evangelists with him.

Paul and his co-workmen were so joyful because of them that they wondered what thanks they could repay God about them. Those words first honored God by recognizing that he

deserves the thanks. Those words also tell how highly they valued the steadfastness of those disciples, that they were at a loss to know how to repay God about them.

Besides rejoicing because of them before God, Paul said they prayed night and day above extraordinary about them. Those are more words showing the great love Paul and his co-workmen had for the disciples at Thessalonica. Praying that way is what we do about those who are most beloved by us.

One of the reasons Paul and his co-workmen prayed that way was probably because of their concern about Satan tempting them away from Christ. For they prayed that they would be able to see their face and mend the deficiencies of their faith. Those who are weak in faith are most vulnerable to temptations. And Paul being with them would have greatly helped mend the deficiencies of their faith.

There are many ways to have deficiencies in the faith of new disciples. It takes time and much study to strengthen faith. That is why Peter spoke of newborn babes needing the genuine intellectual milk (from the word of God), 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).

### Increase and abound in love

- **Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love toward each other, and toward all men, just as also we toward you, in order to establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his sanctified** (First Thessalonians 3:11-13).

Paul asked for two things. The first one was that our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, would direct their way to them. Notice how often Paul expressed their desire to be with the congregation at Thessalonica. That tells us how deeply those disciples there had become in the hearts of Paul and his co-workmen. And that could only have happened because of the superb character of those Thessalonians. They had the kind of spirit that made them very appealing and lovable to Paul and his co-workmen. They were genuine sheep of Christ.

The second thing Paul asked was that the Lord would make them increase and abound in their love toward each other, and toward all men, just as also Paul and his co-workmen had toward them. And just as we should work to increase our knowledge of the word of God, we should also work to increase our love toward each other, and toward all men. Knowledge tells us how to live right, and love motivates us to live right. Of course, our greatest love must be toward God and Christ themselves, who are the most worthy of it.

When Paul said we should increase and abound in love toward all men, he was referring to mankind as a whole. For there are some men that we should not love. What love did Christ show to Herod? He refused to even speak to him (see Luke 23:8-9). What love did the apostles have for Judas after he betrayed Christ? What love did Paul show to the sorcerer

who was opposing him? He had him struck blind for a time. Like the devil himself, there are some men who are unfit for God's love and our love.

Paul said that love increasing and abounding in the Thessalonians would establish their hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his sanctified. The coming of Jesus with all his sanctified refers to the end of the world.

Paul spoke of the Lord making those disciples at Thessalonica increase and abound in love. God can make us increase and abound in our knowledge of his will. And he can make us increase and abound in our love. However, we must have the quality of our spirit and willingness to enable him to do that.

Remember the story of Jeremiah and the potter: **“Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he was making a work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it another vessel again, as seemed good to the potter to make it.**

**“Then the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says Jehovah. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel”** (Jeremiah 18:2-6).

Our hearts must be receptive to God's invisible hand, just as the clay is to the hand of a potter. It is the stubborn and stiff-necked heart that God cannot shape. Those are the ones that deserve to be broken and cast out.

## Ye know how to walk and please God

- **Finally therefore, brothers, we ask you, and summon in the Lord Jesus, that just as ye received from us how ye ought to walk and to please God, that ye may abound more. For ye know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus** (First Thessalonians 4:1-2).

Not only should our knowledge of the will of God, and our love for each other and all men abound, but our living righteously should abound. As we learn from the teachings of the holy scriptures how we ought to walk and to please God, then we should abound more in walking right and pleasing God. We should increase in our knowledge, in our love, and in our righteousness.

Paul said those disciples at Thessalonica had received from him and his co-workmen how they ought to walk and please God. He said the disciples there knew what commandments they gave them through the Lord Jesus. No man receives those things directly any more. We now receive them from the record of the New Testament. Those early disciples needed to receive them directly because they did not yet have the teachings of the New Testament available to them.

## Abstain from fornication

- **For this is the will of God, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication, for each of you to know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and reverence, not in passion of lust, as also the Gentiles who have not known God, not to transgress and to cheat his brother in the affair, because the Lord is vengeful about all these things, as also we forewarned you and solemnly testified (First Thessalonians 4:3-6).**

Remember sanctification means to set apart as pure and holy. And it is God's will that we as children of God and disciples of Christ be sanctified. Our sanctification comes when we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them. Remember, that is when we receive the gift of having the Holy Spirit of God in us. Therefore, having been sanctified by God we must keep ourselves pure and holy.

And purity and holiness require that we abstain from things like fornication. Every normal and healthy man has a sexual appetite. God gave us that for two reasons. One is to strengthen the oneness of flesh we have with our wives. And the other is to bring new souls into the world.

Having given us that appetite God has provided the right way to satisfy it. And the right way is for each of us **“to possess his own vessel in sanctification and reverence.”** Our own vessel is our own wife. And fornication is using an unlawful vessel.

Solomon spoke of that when he urged marital faithfulness: **“Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Should thy springs be dispersed abroad, and streams of water in the streets? Let them be for thyself alone, and not for strangers with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of thy youth: a loving hind and a pleasant doe. Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love. For why should thou, my son, be ravished with an interloping woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?”** (Proverbs 5:15-20).

Notice how Paul said it was for each of us to know how to possess our own vessel. Each age and each society has its own way to establish marriage. And it is for us to know which is the proper way for our generation, as long as it does not violate anything about the righteousness of God. Indeed, Paul said the way we possess our wives should be done in sanctification and reverence.

Paul said possessing our own vessel should not be done in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who have not known God. After Americans decided to become pagan many of them now live together without being married, and half of those who do marry soon separate.

More of them are living like the people in the entertainment business, practicing what is euphemistically called serial polygamy. That means marrying several times one after the other. They are governed by their passions of lust, which they call “falling in love,” and not genuine love with its commitment to always be faithful.

Paul also warned against transgressing and cheating in an affair of fornication. Remember, fornication in its general sense includes the sin of adultery. When Paul spoke of not cheating his brother that way, he was referring to any other man who is lawfully married,

because we are all brothers in the sense of being offspring of God. Adultery cheats a man of one of his most cherished possessions. Solomon gave many warnings against the sin of adultery, especially in the first part of his book of Proverbs. It is interesting that a modern expression for adultery is “having an affair.”

Paul also told how the Lord was vengeful about all those things, meaning the sinful ways to satisfy the sexual appetite. Whether men punish the guilty or not, God will punish them. For he has many ways that he can execute his vengeance.

Paul said he forewarned them and solemnly testified about those things. Fornication and marital infidelity are common among those who do not believe in God, the true God of the Bible. Hence, Paul and his co-workmen forewarned those Thessalonians, because they had been Gentiles who knew not God. And now that so many in America no longer believe in God, we must forewarn them about those things when they accept Christ. For example, if they are living in cohabitation, they must marry and do it in a reverent way.

## God called us in sanctification

- **For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in sanctification. Therefore he who disregards, disregards not man, but God, who also gave his Holy Spirit to you** (First Thessalonians 4:7-8).

Living by passions of lust always results in uncleanness, including the uncleanness of fornication. Sins of any kind defile our spirits with uncleanness. Remember what Jesus said about things that defile a man: **“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 7:20-23).

God called us to be his children in sanctification, which means being undefiled, pure, and holy. The world indulges in spiritual uncleanness. But as children of God we must keep our spirits pure and holy. That is why God called us out of the world to be in his kingdom.

Paul warned that disregarding what he and his co-workmen had commanded against was not rejecting men but God. And whoever rejects God will be rejected by him. No man can disregard what Paul and his co-workmen taught, living in spiritual uncleanness, and still be acceptable to God.

When we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them, then God gives us his Holy Spirit. That means his Holy Spirit resides in us. But it will not remain in us if we return to uncleanness. Be not deceived by false teachers.

## Ye were taught by God to love each other

- **But about brotherly love, ye have no need to write to you, for ye yourselves are taught by God in order to love each other. For ye are also doing it toward all the brothers in all Macedonia** (First Thessalonians 4:9-10).

What Paul meant by the disciples at Thessalonica being themselves taught by God to love each other is not clear. God endows us all with an instinctive sense of right and wrong. And since loving each other is the right thing to do, then by endowing us with that instinctive sense, it can be said that we are all taught by God to love each other.

Sin tends to destroy our innate conscience with its sense of right and wrong. However, the disciples at Thessalonica were not hardened sinners. They still had that strong innate sense of it being the right thing to love each other. They still had within their consciences that part of what God taught them by instinct about right and wrong.

Paul testified that they were doing it toward all the brothers in all Macedonia. They were not just loving each other in Thessalonica, but were loving their brothers all around them. And that was praiseworthy, because that is what God wants of us all.

Of course, what Paul meant by being taught by God was that they were taught from the word of God to love each other as part of being a disciple of Christ.

### Exhorting to walk properly

- **But we exhort you, brothers, to abound more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to do your own things, and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you, so that ye may walk properly toward those outside, and may have nothing lacking** (First Thessalonians 4:10-12).

Paul had been speaking about brotherly love and how they were loving each other. And after that he exhorted them, as brothers in Christ, to abound more, to abound more in brotherly love. He also exhorted them to live as what we would call good citizens in the world. Namely, to aspire to live quietly, to do their own things, and to work with their own hands.

Living quietly, of course, does not mean silently. It means to be gentle, non-aggressive, and peaceful. Although we should aspire to live quietly, that is not always in our control. Paul certainly preferred promoting the good news of Christ quietly but not silently. However, the enemies of Christ often made that impossible for him. And they also may make it impossible for us at times to live quietly, especially when we are proclaiming the genuine Christ, not the mythical Christ the world has invented, the effeminate wimpy long-haired pacifist. Challenge that mythical Christ and you will be reviled and hated.

Doing our own things means attending to our affairs and the ones we are responsible for. Those we call busybodies are people who meddle in the affairs of others, often to the neglect of their own. Paul spoke about them in his second letter to the Thessalonians: **“For we hear of some who walk among you disorderly, not working at all, but being busybodies”** (Second Thessalonians 3:11).

To work with our own hands means to labor personally, and not expect someone else to do everything for us. Our pagan socialist government has created a whole class of people who do not labor with their own hands, but live from the labor of others. Our rulers have decided that everyone deserves financial support, whether they labor or not. They call that support entitlements, because they think everyone is entitled to it. That system tends to perpetuate a lower class, because those in it have little incentive to labor.

Paul said that he and his co-workmen commanded those things of the Thessalonians. They were not options, but commands: abound more in love, live quietly, do your own things, and work with your own hands. And he said the reason was so that they “**may walk properly toward those outside, and may have nothing lacking.**”

Those outside refer to unbelievers, those not in the kingdom of God. We are to walk properly, meaning to live right, not only toward each other, but also toward those outside. That does not mean we should treat them exactly the same way we treat each other. We should not treat other women the way we treat our wives; we should not treat other children the way we treat our own. What Paul meant by walking properly toward those outside, meant we should treat them right and just. We should treat them as we love our neighbors.

Obedying those commands that Paul gave also enables us to have nothing lacking. Not only will we have the right kind of relationship with those outside, but we will not be dependent upon anyone else. And our independence gives us much greater freedom to be fruitful in the Lord.

### Grieve not about those who are asleep

- **But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that ye may not grieve, as also the others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and arose, so also those who became asleep through Jesus, God will bring with him** (First Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Jesus taught us that death is a kind of sleep. Although our flesh dies, our spirit never dies. It sleeps until God awakens it for the great judgment. That was an entirely new idea to the world, including both for Jews and for Gentiles. Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen did not want those brothers at Thessalonica to be ignorant about it. He did not want them ignorant of it so that they would not grieve about death.

Death is something we all face throughout our lives. It is an inevitable part of living in this world. And we grieve when someone we love dies. For unbelievers, that grief can be very bitter because they have no hope. However, we who believe have hope. Therefore, even though we grieve at the death of those we love, we have the comfort of knowing that our spirits never die, and we will all live together in heaven with God.

We will live in heaven, because as Jesus died and arose, so also those who became asleep through Jesus, God will bring with him to heaven. But that will only be for those who believe and obey him while living this life.

### The Lord's return to gather us

- **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).

Paul here explains to us in more detail about what happens when we die. And what he says is **“in the word of the Lord.”** That means what Paul is saying about death is from the word of the Lord himself.

Here is what will happen at the coming of the Lord: First, the Lord himself will descend from heaven (1) with a shout, (2) with a voice of the arch-agent, and (3) with a trumpet of God. Next, the dead in Christ will rise first. Followed by those who are alive. Next, we will all be caught up simultaneously with them in clouds to the Lord’s gathering in the air. Last, we will always be with the Lord, which will be in the New Jerusalem of the new heaven and earth (see Revelation 21:1-3).

Jesus described how he would return when he warned his disciples about false Christ’s and false prophets: **“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. 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.**

**“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 24:27-31).

Jesus will never return to the earth to establish a kingdom here. When he returns it will be at the end of the world to gather his chosen, catching them up in the clouds to take to heaven, just as he ascended after his resurrection.

But only our spirits will be taken to heaven, not our flesh. For Paul said to the Corinthians, **“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). We will be given new incorruptible bodies.

Paul told the brothers at Thessalonica to encourage each other with those words. And we too should encourage each other with the knowledge that we will all be caught up in the air to meet the Lord and be taken to heaven.

### The day of the Lord will come unexpectedly

- **But about the times and the seasons, brothers, ye have no need to be written to you. For ye yourselves know accurately that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction approaches them, as the woman having birth pangs in her womb, and they will, no, not escape** (First Thessalonians 5:1-3).

When Jesus said, **“... 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”** when he returns to gather his chosen, those things will happen suddenly. Many false teach-

ers say that such terrible signs will happen in what they call “the last times.” They claim such things will happen together with wars and famines and other calamities over a period of months or years. Thus, giving people warning that the end was approaching.

However, Paul clearly says the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. It will come when they say, “Peace and safety.” There will be no terrible signs in the so-called last days. Paul said that sudden destruction will approach the unbelievers as a woman having birth pains in her womb. And there will be no escape for those who do not belong to the Lord.

Jesus often warned his disciples to be prepared for the end, because it is unpredictable. For example, he said to them, **“But about that day or that hour no man knows, not even the agents in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father. 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 door-keeper 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 13:32-37).

## We are sons of light

- **But ye, brothers, are not in darkness, so that the day would seize you as a thief. Ye are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness** (First Thessalonians 5:4-5).

We are not in darkness because we have been taught the word of God, and have heard the warnings that Jesus gave to be prepared. Consequently, the last day will not seize us as a thief the way it will seize unrepentant sinners who reject Christ and his words.

When Jesus told about the end of the world, he said, **“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. 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 21:25-28). When Jesus is seen coming in a cloud we will lift up our heads with expectation and joy, not with shock and fear as the sinners will.

When Paul said that we are all sons of light and sons of the day, not of the night nor of darkness, he was contrasting us with the sinners of the world. Sinners love the darkness because their deeds are evil. Deceit is a form of darkness, and the world loves deceit. Officially the world is against deceit. Nevertheless, it is generally understood that deceit is part of the rules of a worldly life, where the only sin to them is being caught doing it.

## Let us not sleep

- **So then let us not sleep, as also the others, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are intoxicated get drunk at night** (First Thessalonians 5:6-7).

What Paul means by sleeping is being unaware and unprepared for the coming of the Lord. In that sense we should not sleep, but watch and be sober. We are all sons of light and sons of the day, but sinners are of the night and of darkness. Therefore, they are asleep to the coming of the Lord. Those who are intoxicated get drunk at night. Hence, sinners are in a drunken stupor to the coming of the Lord. They walk about oblivious to it. Therefore, they make no effort to prepare themselves for it.

## Put on faith, love, and hope

- **But we, being of the day, should be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet, the hope of salvation** (First Thessalonians 5:8).

Being disciples of Christ means we are of the day, and we should act that way. We should be sober about the future, not in a stupor about the coming of the day of the Lord.

Paul spoke of putting on a breastplate and a helmet. Those pieces of armor are designed to protect us from attacks. He called the breastplate, faith and love. And he called the helmet, the hope of salvation. Thus, we should put on faith, love, and the hope of salvation to protect us from attacks; attacks that would destroy our souls. We need to always preserve and keep with us our faith, our love, and our hope, because without them our souls are very vulnerable to attacks from the devil and his disciples.

## An acquired possession of salvation

- **Because God appointed us not for wrath, but for an acquired possession of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us** (First Thessalonians 5:9).

God's wrath is coming upon the world because of its sinfulness. But we who have chosen Christ and his good news no longer belong to the world. We are in the world, but are not of the world. For we belong to God and his kingdom. The world is appointed for wrath because it rejects God's Son Jesus Christ. But we are an acquired possession of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are an acquired possession of salvation because Christ died for us. His death on the cross was the climax of his life of perfect obedience to the Father, so that he could save us from the condemnation of our sins. That way he was able to pay for our sins, because that was part of God's reward for his perfect obedience in this world of trials and temptations. Thus, that made us an acquired possession of salvation.

## Therefore encourage each other

- **So that, whether we are awake or sleep, we should live together with him. Therefore encourage each other, and build ye up one by one, just as ye also are doing** (First Thessalonians 5:10-11).

We belong to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are children of God, because Christ paid for our sins, sanctified us, purified us and made us holy, and then God adopted us. Christ died for us so that whether we are alive in the flesh or sleep in death, we will still live together with him. That means regardless of our physical condition, we will always live together with Christ. Remember, we are parts of his body.

Paul earlier told how Christ was going to return to raise us up (our divine spirit) for life in heaven with him. And he said for us to encourage each other with those words. And now he says again that we should encourage each other. He also told them to build themselves up one by one, just as they also were doing.

Collectively, we are the body of Christ on the earth. And as a body we must build ourselves up one by one, neglecting no member of it. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“God united the body together, having given more abundant regard to the part that lacks, so that there would be no schisms in the body, but that the parts would have the same care for each other. 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 12:24-27).

## Those who labor and lead you in the Lord

- **And we ask you, brothers, to acknowledge those who labor among you, and who lead you in the Lord, and who admonish you, and to esteem them with exceptional love because of their work. Live peaceably among yourselves** (First Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Notice how Paul said for the disciples at Thessalonica to acknowledge *those* (plural) who do those things. He did not say to acknowledge the *man* (singular) who does those things. There is nothing in the scriptures that supports the practice of having one man, a priest or pastor or minister, do all those things in a congregation to the exclusion of anyone else, including the role of leading them.

Paul said we should acknowledge them and esteem them with exceptional love because of their work, which work is to promote the body of Christ. We should acknowledge them and esteem them both for the sake of that work and in appreciation for their doing that work.

Saying that we should esteem them with exceptional love indicates we should not love everyone to the same degree. We are indeed to love each other, but not to the same degree. A husband should not love his sister to the same degree he loves his wife.

Paul added that we should live peaceably among ourselves. There are four great forces of life in this world: the force of life, the force of conflict, the force of laboring to survive, and the force of death. Hence, there is a natural and constant tendency for conflict among

men, even in the congregations of Christ. But we must resist that evil force, and strive to live peaceably among ourselves. We must continually work for it because it will not happen naturally. Only fools live naturally by their instincts and impulses. I speak much more about those four forces (symbolized by the four horses of the apocalypse) in my commentary about the book of Revelation.

## Admonish, strengthen, help, be patient

- **And we encourage you, brothers, admonish the unruly, strengthen the weak-spirited, help the infirm, be patient toward all** (First Thessalonians 5:14).

There are four things in that passage that Paul encouraged them to do:

admonish the unruly  
 strengthen the weak-spirited  
 help the infirm  
 be patient toward all

The unruly are those who are hard to control. Paul was probably referring to those who are slow and difficult to obey, and who continually question and challenge authority. Those things can lead to rebelliousness. That may be why Paul said to admonish them instead of rebuke them. As an admonition is less severe than a rebuke, so also being unruly is less severe than being rebellious.

The weak-spirited are those who are mentally depressed. There are many things that can cause a man to be weak-spirited. Having a broken spirit is a more severe form of being weak-spirited. Solomon said these things about a broken spirit: **“A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones”** (Proverbs 17:22), and, **“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a broken spirit who can bear?”** (Proverbs 18:14). Therefore, we should strengthen the weak-spirited whenever we are able.

Anyone who is infirm needs help, and we should try to help them when we can. In these modern times there are many resources to help the infirm. Sometimes the best way for us to help them is to be sure they have access to those resources.

Patience is a virtue that we should show to all men, especially to our brothers and sister in Christ. Nevertheless, like most of the virtues, patience is often difficult to practice. That makes it a quality of the most mature and wise men. Indeed, Solomon said about it, **“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city”** (Proverbs 16:32).

## Always pursue the good

- **See that not any man repays evil for evil to any man, but always pursue the good, both for each other and for all** (First Thessalonians 5:15).

It is not our right to repay evil for evil, because God said, **“Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord”** (Romans 12:19). God repays evil for evil. And in the world he does it through the offices of authority that each nation has. Speaking of them, Paul said,

**“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). And if the man in the office of authority will not do it, then God has other ways to apply wrath to the man who commits evil.

As children of God we should always pursue the good, both for each other and for all. To bring glory to God we must always pursue the good. Moreover, pursuing the good produces good fruits, consequently bringing its own rewards. Although we cannot always see the good fruits that our good will produce, God sees and he will reward us somehow.

Remember what Jesus said about being rewarded for good deeds toward the innocent and the righteous: **“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 10:41-42).

## More Commandments

**“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything express thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not disdain prophecies, but examine all things. Hold firm the good. Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (First Thessalonians 5:16-22).

Paul gave seven commandments here about various things, each one expressed very concisely:

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing.

In everything express thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not disdain prophecies, but examine all things.

Hold firm the good.

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

As children of God we should rejoice always because God has adopted us to be his own, and because of the hope he has given us through Christ for eternal life with him in heaven. Paul underscored that command in his letter to the Philippians, when he said, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”** (Philippians 4:4).

We pray without ceasing by always being conscious of God and his love for us. We should always have him in the background of our thinking, and for every appropriate time we can speak to him in our heart. We can ask for his help, we can thank him for his blessings, we can praise him about his wonders. There are many times in our thoughts that we can speak to him. That is how we pray without ceasing.

Paul also commanded us to express thanks in everything, which was the will of God in Christ for us. God deserves our thanks in everything, because 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). I have often quoted that passage in my commentary because it needs to always be remembered.

When Paul said not to quench the Spirit, he was referring to the Holy Spirit within us. To quench means to extinguish or suppress. The Holy Spirit influences us through out knowledge of the word of God, and through the strength of our conscience. We should never diminish that influence in us, because that would lead to forsaking Christ and his will for us.

Prophecies contain both the word of God for us, and also predictions of the future. Prophecies now are only found in the Holy Bible, because God no longer speaks to men in any other way. Paul commanded us not to disdain prophecies. Scoffers disdain the word of God. But ignoring what it says is another way to disdain prophecies. There are general prophecies recorded in the New Testament that still apply today, such as the prophecy of the end of the world. Those prophecies should be taken very seriously and not distained.

Furthermore, with regard to prophecies, Paul also said we should examine all things. We should not be naïve about the many prophecies that men are promoting. Most of those prophecies are based upon the wrong interpretation of scriptures. Therefore, they need to be carefully examined using the word of God in its entirety, not just a passage here or there that many use.

We should examine all things because the world is filled with evils, and it is always prudent to examine things. That is especially true of things associated with the word of God and our faith in Christ. For example, the apostle 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).

Paul also said we should also hold firm the good. In this sinful world evil is constantly threatening the good. Therefore, we must hold firm to it, whatever that good may be. Good things include our faith, our knowledge and understanding of the word of God, our love and good relationships with each other, even such things as our health and our financial security. Carelessness and neglect can cause evils to come upon all those things.

Finally in that passage Paul said we should abstain from all appearance of evil. It is not enough just to abstain from evil, we must also abstain from all appearance of it. For the mere appearance of evil can generate evil, such as gossip and slander. Therefore, be very careful about how the things you do may appear. Do not, however, use appearances as the hypocrites do, to manipulate the way people think. Use appearances like everything else, to promote truth and righteousness.

## May God sanctify and preserve you

- **And may the God of peace himself sanctify you thoroughly. And may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he who calls you, who also will do it** (First Thessalonians 5:23-24).

God of the Bible, the only true God, is a God of peace. For it is only through peace that life and growth can happen. When God goes to war, and commands us to fight for him, it is

only to defeat sin so that we can have peace. For wherever there is sin there can be no peace.

Sanctification means being set apart as holy. Paul called upon God to sanctify them thoroughly. As we grow in Christ so our sanctification grows. As we imitate Christ and become more like him so our sanctification becomes more complete. Just as our salvation is not complete until the end of our lives here, so is our sanctification. Otherwise Paul would not have called upon God to sanctify us thoroughly.

Paul also asked that our spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have a divine spirit because we are offspring of God. He has given us a body of flesh for our lives here upon the earth. Our soul is our complete life, which is the combination of our spirit and our body.

When Paul asked that our spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, he was referring to our lives here in this world. While we live in this world our spirit and soul and body can be corrupted. Our spirit can be corrupted into an evil spirit by our own free will. Our body can be corrupted in many ways as we all can see. Our soul (our life) is corrupted when we corrupt our spirit with sin. Paul was calling for the good health of every part of us.

Regarding the matter of being blameless, Christ enabled us to be purified from our sins, making us blameless before God as his own children. Those who return to a life of sin lose their blamelessness. And Paul was calling upon God to keep us blameless by helping us avoid returning to a life of sin. For we must remain blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ so that when he returns he will take us to heaven with him to become sons of God for eternity.

Paul then gave us the encouraging words that he who calls us is faithful and he will do it. God will preserve us complete, blamelessly at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will do it as long as we believe and obey him faithfully.

## Pray and salute

- **Brothers, pray about us. Salute all the brothers by a holy kiss** (First Thessalonians 5:25-26).

Paul often prayed about the disciples, and he often asked for the disciples to pray about him and his co-workmen. Therefore, we too should pray about each other. Prayer is speaking to God, and Jesus promised us that our prayers would be heard and answered.

Remember, a salute is a greeting, and it can be expressed 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 an embrace or a handshake.

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. It would no more be received with approval than if I insisted on washing their feet (see John 13).

## Share the letter

- **I adjure you by the Lord that the letter be read to all the holy brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with you. Truly** (First Thessalonians 5:27-28).

To adjure means to earnestly appeal. It is a strong word that Paul used with his command that this letter be read to all the holy brothers. This letter contains the word of God. And the word of God should be available to every disciple of Christ. The Roman Catholic Church discourages its members from reading the Bible. Before the protestant revolution they even made it a capital crime to translate it so that it could be read and understood by everybody who is literate. They want to keep their members from the Bible because the Bible condemns their entire system.

Paul's command for the letter to be read to all the holy brothers is also a command that we listen to its words. Therefore, be zealous to listen to its words and study the word of God in the Bible. Do not neglect it lest you be led astray. For the word of God is a shining light to our souls in this dark and sinful world.

Paul ended his letter by telling them that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was with us. He used those words at the end or near the end of most of his letters. And knowing that the grace of Christ is with us is indeed encouraging to our spirit.

# A Commentary on The Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

## Greeting

- **Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the congregation of Thessalonians in God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ** (Second Thessalonians 1:1-2).

Those are the exact same words that are at the beginning of the Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. How much time passed between those two letters is not known. But as the words indicate, Silvanus and Timothy were still with him.

## Their increasing faith and abounding love

- **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** (Second Thessalonians 1:3).

Paul said that he and his co-workmen were indebted to thank God always about the disciples at Thessalonica. That means they were obligated to thank God about them. In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul also spoke of being indebted to thank God about them: **“For what thanks can we repay God about you, for all the joy in which we rejoiced because of you before our God ... ?”** (First Thessalonians 3:9).

They were indebted to thank God, Paul said, because the faith of the Thessalonians was increasing greatly, and the love of each one of them all toward each other abounded. And those good things happened because of the good news of Christ, which came from God.

It was God, through his Son Jesus Christ, who brought his kingdom into the world. And the many blessings that happen to those who believe are a consequence of that kingdom. Just one of those blessing is the peace that passes all understanding that Paul wrote about elsewhere (see Philippians 4:7). Another blessing is the loving fellowship we have with each other. And those good things bring us all the joy in which to rejoice because of each other. That is why we are all indebted to thank God about each other. It is fitting that we thank him always.

Without the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God, the church, there would be no children of God with which to share our spiritual lives with. There would be no gatherings of the children of God in congregations to encourage our faith in him, to encourage us to live righteously, to offer us shelter from the sinfulness of the world, and to share our love for each other as his children. Therefore, it is fitting to always thank God for each other, especially as our faith increases and our love toward each other abounds.

## Suffering and worthiness

- **So as for us ourselves to have pride in you among 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 1:4-5).

Paul here mentions the perseverance and the faith of the disciples at Thessalonica in all their persecutions and in the tribulations that they endured. The congregation at Thessalonica appeared to be an especially strong one in the Lord even though they were suffering persecutions and tribulations. Therefore, Paul and his co-workmen had much pride in them. Unlike the congregations at Corinth and Galatia, Paul had nothing to criticize the disciples there about.

The fact the disciples at Thessalonica were strong in the Lord even with persecutions and tribulations teaches us that persecutions and tribulations are not the cause of weakness in the Lord. In fact, Paul said to the brothers at Rome, “**And not only so, but we also take pride in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope**” (Romans 5:3-4). It all depends upon the quality of a man’s own spirit, which he himself determines with his own free will. Sinners are defeated by tribulations, but the righteous are strengthened by them.

Paul said the faith and perseverance of the Thessalonians, even in all their persecutions and tribulations, was evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Our relationship with God is based upon merit not partiality. For God’s judgments are always righteous and just. We must prove our worthiness of membership in the kingdom of God. And we do it by trusting him and persevering even when suffering persecutions and tribulations.

Although no man can earn his salvation, nevertheless, we must all prove our worthiness of it. Remember, this world is a time of testing for us, to determine those who are worthy of becoming sons of God for eternity. That is one reason why God allows us to suffer. It is a way of separating the unworthy from the worthy. Remember that when you suffer.

## Restriction to those who restrict us

- **Since it is a righteous thing according to God to repay restriction to those who restrict you, and relief with us, to you who are restricted, at the revealing of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his agents of power in a fire of flame rendering vengeance to those who have not known God, and to those not obeying the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ** (Second Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Although God allows us to suffer persecutions in this life, justice will be done when this life is over. This world will end at the revealing of the Lord Jesus from heaven. He will be revealed with his agents of power in a fire of flame. That fire of flame may be what Peter meant, 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).

That fire of flame will begin God’s vengeance against those who have not known him, and those not obeying the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. What Paul means by not knowing God is not acknowledging him as Lord. It is not simply lacking knowledge about God.

Remember what Jesus said would be his reply on the day of judgment to many of those who called him, “Lord, Lord”: **“I never acknowledged you. Depart from me, ye who work lawlessness”** (Matthew 7:23). He knew them but he never acknowledged them.

God is going to render vengeance to those who do not acknowledge him, and who do not obey the good news of Christ. His vengeance not only involves a fire of flame, but also restriction. For God’s enemies, unrepentant sinners, will be in bondage, restricted and unable to exercise their will. They will suffer restriction as repayment for restricting us.

Sinners restrict us in many ways, both directly and indirectly. They restrict us directly with the rules and laws and evil traditions they make about what we can do and cannot do. They restrict us directly by challenging the credibility of the word of God and by uttering all kinds of slander against us. They restrict us indirectly with all their sinfulness. As John said, **“Every man doing sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”** (First John 3:4). And lawlessness greatly limits our freedoms.

But at the revealing of the Lord from heaven he will give us relief. Paul said that God’s restriction to those who restrict us, and relief with us who are restricted, is a righteous thing according to God. Those things are justice, and God loves justice. I too love justice. And so when that happens my heart will leap with joy within me.

## A penalty of eternal destruction

- **Men who will suffer punishment, a penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified in his sanctified, and to be marveled in that day by all those who believe (because our testimony among you was believed)** (Second Thessalonians 1:9-10).

When this sinful world is over, those who know not God (in the sense of not acknowledging him as their Lord) and do not obey the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer punishment. That punishment is a penalty of eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might. Their punishment of eternal destruction will be in the outer darkness away from the glorious presence of the Lord and the magnificent glory of his might.

Remember the lesson Jesus gave about that in his parable of the king who gave a wedding for his son; the lesson about what would happen to the man who was unprepared. The king commanded, **“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 22:13).

But for us who love God and obey the good news of his Son Jesus Christ, we will see his presence and the glory of his might, and we will marvel in that great day. We will be in his

presence and marvel him because we believe the testimony that Paul and his co-workmen gave. The unbelievers and the scoffers will suffer punishment in the lake of fire.

## Pray that God will make us worthy

- **For which also we pray always about you, so that our God will make you worthy of the calling, and will fulfill every desire of goodness and work of faith with power. So that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ (Second Thessalonians 1:11-12).**

Paul said they always prayed about those disciples. Paul and his co-workmen prayed about all the disciples of the Lord, and so should we. For we are all brothers and sisters of each other in him.

Notice how Paul said they prayed that our God would make them worthy of the calling. Remember, the calling refers to God's call for us to believe his Son Jesus Christ so that we can become his sons for eternity. God can make us worthy of that calling, but only if we allow him. We must work with him to make us worthy. We work with him by being steadfast in our faith and in our obedience.

Paul also said they prayed that God would fulfill every desire of goodness and work of faith with power. A desire is an inner motive for something. Desires can lead to actions when there are opportunities. The fulfillment of desires of goodness are deeds of righteousness. Faith is a combination of belief and trust. And our belief and trust in God also leads to actions when there are opportunities. And works of faith produce righteousness.

God is able to fulfill every desire of goodness and work of faith with power. That means if God is with us, then our desires of goodness and our works of faith will have his power behind them. Those labors will be empowered by God himself (but not miraculously), especially by his Holy Spirit within us. Therefore, we should persevere in our labors for him, knowing that his power is with us. And somehow in his own time and way he will bless our labors.

Paul said that God would do those things so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and we in him. And that is according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. When we persevere in righteousness then our Lord Christ will be glorified in us and we in him. In this world Jesus may not be glorified in us and we in him, but in the world to come he will be glorified in all who are faithful to him, and we will be glorified in him. Remember, Jesus was not glorified in the world when he lived here, but he is now glorified in heaven and always will be.

The glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ in us and our glorification in him is according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. That means it was because of the wonderful grace of God that enabled us to glorify the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it enabled us to be glorified in him. God's grace enabled us to be glorified together: Christ as the only begotten Son of God and we as his brothers, will all be sons of God for eternity in heaven.

## Be not alarmed about the day of Christ

- **Now we ask you, brothers, on behalf of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, for ye not to be quickly shaken from your mind, nor to be alarmed, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by a letter as by us, as that the day of the Christ has come** (Second Thessalonians 2:1-2).

Paul is here assuring the brothers at Thessalonica about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, not to be quickly shaken from their mind, nor to be alarmed that the day of the Christ has come. He warned them not to be troubled that the day of Christ has come. They should not to be troubled about that day, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by a letter as from Paul and his co-workmen.

What Paul meant by not being troubled by spirit, probably refers to thoughts within them about that day. The word spirit means energy. And the energy of our thoughts are like spir-its within us. They are like the electrical energy that creates the activities of computers. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Being troubled by word refers, of course, to things they hear from other people, such as rumors and hearsay. Paul also warned them about any kind of letter that was supposedly from Paul and his co-workmen that claimed the day of the Christ had come.

## The man of sin, the son of destruction

- **Let not any man deceive you in any way, because if not, the defection may come sooner, and he may be revealed—the man of sin, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or an object of worship, so as for him to sit in the temple of God, as God, displaying himself that he is God. Do ye not remember that when I was yet with you I told you these things?** (Second Thessalonians 2:3-5).

In this passage and several subsequent ones, Paul uses many unique expressions, such as, “the defection,” “the man of sin,” “the mystery of lawlessness,” “the spirit of his mouth,” “that which restrains,” “developing from the midst,” and “revealed in his own time,” none of which are used anywhere else in the Bible.

Paul first warned them against allowing any man to deceive them in any way. Otherwise the defection might come sooner. The defection probably refers to the congregations being led astray into error. That defection eventually came with the rise of the fraudulent Catholic Church system. That defection prevailed for about a thousand years, until the time of the Protestant reformation.

Paul said that if the defection came sooner, the man of sin, the son of destruction, might be revealed. And then he described what that man of sin would be like. Paul said the man of sin would oppose and exalt himself against all that is called God or an object of worship, so as for him to sit in the temple of God, as God, displaying himself that he is God. Any man who would do such a thing is indeed a man of sin and a son of destruction.

Paul’s description of the man of sin best applies to the Catholic Pope. There are many other men who have made that conclusion. You can read much about that explanation of

this passage on the internet. See for example, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/677-study-of-pauls-man-of-sin-a>.

The Catholic papacy is an office held by a man who is replaced as each one ages and dies. It actually represents a kind of dynasty. The individual Popes die, but the office of Pope endures. And each successive office holder opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or an object of worship. Each successive office holder also sits in the temple of God, as God, displaying himself that he is God. The name Pope itself comes from a word that means father (papa), and the Catholic Pope claims to be the supreme Father (Pope) in the world of all believers.

Since the temple of God on the earth is the hearts of believers (see First Corinthians 3:16-17), then each successive holder of the office of Pope reigned there (for that thousand years). Each successive Pope proclaims that he is the embodiment of Christ in the world, and his (the Pope's) word is the word of God. And since the Catholic Church ruthlessly dominated all believers during those thousand years, and the vast majority of believers were unable to read and study the Bible for themselves during that time, then virtually all believers in Christ were forced to accept his claim. Hence, he sat in the temple of God (in the hearts of believers) **“as God, displaying himself that he is God.”** That means he was recognized in the hearts of believers as the embodiment of God.

Moreover, he resides in a palace, sits upon a throne, and is arrayed in royal apparel with a crown upon his head. His servants carry him on their shoulders while he sits upon a portable throne; they kneel before him and kiss his hand; and they call him “most holy father.” There is no man upon the earth that best describes the man of sin that Paul spoke about than the Catholic Pope. His life is the very antithesis of how Jesus lived on the earth and taught us about who is the greater among us (see Matthew 18:4).

If you wonder how such a man, who seems to be so gentle, loving, and pious, could be the man of sin, remember this passage that Paul wrote about such men at Corinth: **“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).

Paul reminded the disciples at Thessalonica that he told those things to them when he was yet with them. We know not how many of the congregations Paul told about those things. Indeed, here in this letter is the only record in the Bible that reports them. One reason is probably because knowing those things is not necessary for us. Another reason may be because the congregation at Thessalonica was so strong in the faith. It is natural to be given knowledge beyond the essentials with increasing maturity.

Regarding the expression **“son of destruction”** Jesus called Judas that when he said to his apostles at the time of the last supper, **“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). The Pope, the man of sin, is also called the son of destruction because like Judas he serves the devil.

Notice how Paul warned them, **“Let not any man deceive you in any way, because if not, the defection may come sooner, and he may be revealed—the man of sin, the son of destruction ... .”** That defection into the Catholic Church system, with its man of sin

and son of destruction, would come sooner if the disciples of Christ were deceived. It was the truth of Christ that prevented it from happening, and it is the truth of Christ (found in the holy scriptures of the Bible) that has saved us from it.

During that thousand years (between those first centuries of the church and the time of the Protestant Reformation) the Catholic Church was ruthlessly dominant. They tolerated no criticism or opposition. And the death penalty was often imposed upon all who challenged them. For example, the Englishman William Tyndale (1492-1536) was burned at the stake in Europe because he translated the New Testament into English for people to read.

Since the rulers of the Catholic Church withheld the word of God from the people during those thousand years, then God will not judge the people for not obeying things of his will about which they were ignorant.

Consider this passage: **“And Jesus said, For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing might see, and those who see might become blind. 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 9:39-41).

Believers of Christ during those thousand years were kept blind by the rulers of the Catholic Church. Those rulers will be judged, but not the people whom they kept blind about the word of God. Nevertheless remember, if a man wilfully keeps himself blind to the truth like those Pharisees, his guilt will remain.

## The mystery of lawlessness

- **And now ye know that which restrains, for him to be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already working, only he who restrains it until now will develop from the midst** (Second Thessalonians 2:6-7).

That which restrains the man of sin is the word of God. That prevented him from developing during the time of the apostles. Revealing him in his own time probably means the word of God will reveal him while he is reigning over believers, because that is what happened to the Pope at the Protestant reformation. The word of God revealed him to be the man of sin.

Paul spoke of lawlessness being a mystery. He seems to have been referring to lawlessness in the false doctrines and erroneous practices of the church. It was a mystery because it was very carefully concealed, disguising itself as truth and righteousness. Paul may have called that lawlessness a mystery because he did not understand how and why God would allow it to overwhelm the entire brotherhood, although he knew that process was already working.

He knew it was already working, because he said to the elders at Ephesus when he told them they would no longer see his face, **“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).

What Paul meant by **“he who restrains it until now”** was the word of God, which would develop from the midst of the church from the teachings of Christ and his apostles, that were gradually assembled to comprise the text of the New Testament. For the word of God, which was given through Christ and his apostles, was restraining that lawlessness during their time.

Why Paul would refer to the word of God as “he” is not clear. Perhaps it was because the entire word of God came by inspiration from God’s Holy Spirit. It did not originate with the individual men. It originated from him, God’s Holy Spirit. (The Holy Spirit is usually referred to as “it” although there are times when the Holy Spirit is expressed in the masculine gender.)

The words, **“... he who restrains it until now will develop from the midst”** means the New Testament of the word of God (inspired by God’s Holy Spirit) would develop from within the church. And the word of God preached by the apostles restrained the lawlessness of false doctrines and erroneous practices by believers during their time. Later the record of their teachings was assembled into the New Testament. That New Testament developed from within the church, **“developed from the midst.”**

## The lawless will be revealed

- **And then the lawless will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the spirit of his mouth, and will neutralize at the appearance of his coming** (Second Thessalonians 2:8).

Paul said to them that when the word of God in the New Testament develops from the church, then the lawless will be revealed, and the Lord will consume him with the spirit of his mouth. Knowledge of the word of God, which was concealed from believers by the Catholic Church, reveals the false doctrines and practices of that Church, including the Pope who is the head of it.

That knowledge reveals their unlawfulness, and that false church will eventually be entirely consumed by the power (the spirit) of the word of God (the Lord’s mouth). The Lord will also neutralize completely every false doctrine and erroneous practice at the appearance of his coming, which means his return at the end of the world when he takes us up to heaven to be with him.

Regarding the expression “the lawless” Paul used it in this passage 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 ...”** (First Timothy 1:8-9). In that passage the lawless refers to unrighteous men of whatever kind.

And Peter used it twice in his second letter. The first time, he said, **“And he rescued righteous Lot, being distressed by the conduct of the lawless in their licentiousness ...”** (Second Peter 2:7). The lawless in that passage refers to the men of Sodom. The second time Peter used it, he said, **“Ye therefore, beloved, knowing in advance, keep watch, lest, having accommodated to the error of the lawless, ye fall from your own steadfastness”** (Second Peter 3:17). The lawless in that passage seems to be used like the one in Paul’s letter to Timothy, referring simply to unrighteous men of whatever kind.

However, Paul’s use of the expression **“the lawless”** in the above passage from Second Thessalonians means something different. For he spoke about when **“the lawless”** would be revealed. But the world is filled with unrighteous men that are clearly revealed by how they live; they can already be easily seen by their evil works. They do not need to be revealed.

For that reason I believe Paul’s use of the expression **“the lawless”** in this letter refers to the man of sin whom he mentioned earlier, which describes the Catholic Pope. And it was knowledge of the word of God that revealed the Catholic Pope to be lawless toward the will of God.

### The working of Satan with all deception

- **Whose coming is according to 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** (Second Thessalonians 2:9-10).

Paul said the coming of the lawless, the man of sin, would be according to the working of Satan. Which working includes **“all power and signs and marvels of deceit, and in all deception of unrighteousness in those who are perishing.”**

Deceit is the primary weapon that Satan uses in his war against God. Although God cannot be deceived, his offspring can. Therefore, Satan uses deceit with men to lead them astray from God and make them allies with him.

Paul said the coming of the lawless, the man of sin (the Pope of the Catholic Church), would be according to the working of Satan with

- all power of deceit
- all signs of deceit
- all marvels of deceit
- all deception of unrighteousness

Deceit has great power to manipulate and control men, which is no doubt why it is Satan’s primary weapon. Deceit was how Satan was able to become the ruler of this world. And the power of deceit is how Satan continues to be able to have men serve him instead of God. For example, there is not a country in the world that has committed itself to Jesus Christ, not one. And the power of deceit is the reason why the authentic church of Christ consists of a tiny minority of those who claim to believe in Christ.

Signs and marvels involve extraordinary things and events. Signs of deceit and marvels of deceit refer to extraordinary things and events that are caused by deceit. For remember,

deceit has great power to manipulate and control men. And sometimes that power brings about extraordinary things and events, which can greatly impress those who see them happening. Shrewdly performed deceit can cause astonishing things among men. Illusionists and magicians are experts at using deception to cause astonishing things to appear happening. Yet they are all tricks to deceive.

The working of Satan also involves all deception of unrighteousness in those who are perishing. Unrighteousness itself is deceitful. That is why temptations are another powerful weapon of Satan. It makes sin seem to be a good thing to do. For example, the temptation to commit adultery appeals to sinners because it can give them pleasure. Nevertheless, that temptation is deceptive because adultery is a deadly sin.

Being subject to the working of Satan with all those powers and signs and marvels of deceit, and in all deception of unrighteousness, is a consequence of refusing to accept the love of the truth in order to be saved. The truth is that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and it is only through him that souls can be saved. All who refuse to accept that truth will be manipulated and controlled by the deceitful workings of Satan. Only faith in Christ alone frees us from him.

## God will send the force of a delusion

- **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 2:11-12).**

Because of this, because **“they did not accept the love of the truth,”** Paul said that God would send them the force of a delusion, for them to believe a lie. That force of a delusion does not refer to one thing, but to whatever delusion that would be most fitting for each different circumstance. For the modern world, a major force of delusion is the theory of evolution, which makes men believe the lie that the Bible record about God creating the world in six days is a myth.

Other forces of a delusion are the religions of Islam and Hinduism. Wherever Hinduism is practiced you will find poverty and filth. Wherever Islam is practiced in its genuine form there is cruelty and violence.

Faith in the lie of whatever force of delusion that God sends will cause them to be condemned. They will be condemned that way because they did not believe the truth, but delighted in unrighteousness.

The American people forsook God and believed the delusion of evolution because they would not believe the truth, but delighted in unrighteousness. And ever since then, sin and wickedness in the country has greatly multiplied. Many books have been written about the different kinds of sin and wickedness that have multiplied and grown in my country. All agree it has happened, but sinners cannot believe their delusions are the cause of it.

## God chose us from the beginning

- **But we are indebted to express thanks to God always about you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation, in sanctification of spirit and belief of truth, for which he called you, through our good news, for an acquired possession of glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (Second Thessalonians 2:13-14).**

This is the second time that Paul said they were indebted to thank God always about them. He said they were beloved by the Lord because God chose them from the beginning for salvation. From the beginning God chose all of us who love him for salvation. It was part of God's plan from the beginning to save all who love him, and his truth and righteousness. That is how he chooses us for salvation. Every man who makes his spirit like that of his Son Jesus Christ will be chosen by the Lord for salvation, because that was his plan even from before the beginning of Creation.

God chose us for salvation in sanctification of spirit and belief of truth. By having the kind of spirit that God wants of us he saves us by sanctifying our spirit. He sanctifies it by making it pure and holy, and set apart from the world to belong to him. God also saves us by our belief of truth. Having the right kind of spirit makes us humble and open minded for the truth. So that when we hear the truth, the good news of Christ, we will believe it. And believing it we will obey it.

And having chosen us from the beginning, the beginning of Creation, God calls us through the good news of Christ. We can know that he chose us from the beginning if we hearken to Christ and his good news, because that is how he calls us. And we can identify those whom he did not choose because they will not hearken to his call. Therefore, there can be no doubts in our minds about our being chosen for salvation.

God calls us for an acquired possession of glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said he called the Thessalonians through the good news that he and his co-workmen were proclaiming to them. And that good news has been permanently recorded for us in the words of the New Testament. Therefore, God now calls us for an acquired possession of glory of our Lord Jesus Christ through the words of the New Testament, which is the word of God.

We are an acquired possession of glory of our Lord Christ because he bought us. As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“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).

He bought us by redeeming our souls from the condemnation of our sins. God gave him the right to buy us because he obeyed God perfectly even to his death upon a cross. That perfect obedience brought him glory that none else can ever attain, and we are an acquired possession of that glory.

## Stand firm and hold to the traditions

- **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that ye were taught, whether by word or by letter from us (Second Thessalonians 2:15).**

Having been chosen by God for salvation we must stand firm and hold the traditions we were taught. Standing firm means to resist any effort to deviate from the authentic good news of Christ, his good news that is taught in the words of the New Testament.

Traditions are certain ways of behaving that are commonly practiced. The traditions taught by the good news of Christ were given to promote truth and righteousness. Those are the ones we must hold to. All competing traditions must be opposed. Other incidental traditions are optional and can be adjusted over time.

The traditions they had were taught by word of mouth or by letter from Paul and the other apostles. Those men can no longer teach us by word of mouth, but they continue to teach from the letters and books they wrote that have been recorded in the New Testament. I cannot emphasize it too much: if you want to know what is the genuine good news of Christ, then study the New Testament, and be not misled by the numerous false teachings of men.

## Eternal encouragement and good hope

- **And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and our God and Father who loved us and gave eternal encouragement and good hope through grace, encourage your hearts and establish you in every good word and work** (Second Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Jesus Christ is our Lord, and God is our Father. Paul said that God our Father **“loved us and gave eternal encouragement and good hope through grace.”** He loved us by giving us life and saving our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins so that we could become his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

He also gave us eternal encouragement. Encouragement means to give hope and confidence. Eternal means everlasting, never ending. That is the kind of hope and confidence God has given us. But that encouragement is only for those who believe in him.

God also gave us good hope. Hope is a desire for something that is anticipated to happen in the future. God gave us a good desire for something to happen in the future. That good hope is for us to have eternal life as sons of God in heaven. It is the very best thing we could hope for. It is the most wonderful thing that we can look forward to enjoying after this life is over. There is no better hope, and we have it through our faith in Christ.

God gave us eternal encouragement and good hope through grace. That means it was because of his loving kindness and generosity that we have eternal encouragement and good hope. For no man has the ability to earn those things. They are a free gift of his grace, in return for our love and trust in him.

Paul called upon our Lord Christ himself and our God and Father to encourage our hearts and establish us in every good word and work. Words convey information and knowledge. And good words are those that promote good things.

There are numerous potential good words and works. Whatever kind of good word or work that we are involved with, Paul asked that God and Christ encourage our hearts and establish us in it. In other words, Paul called upon God and Christ to encourage our hearts and establish us in all our knowledge of truth and in every act of righteousness.

## The faith is not of all men

- **Finally, brothers, pray about us, so that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, just as also with you, and that we may be delivered from aberrant and wicked men, for the faith is not of all men. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and will keep you from evil (Second Thessalonians 3:1-3).**

Paul asked the disciples at Thessalonica to pray about him and his co-workmen (1) so that the word of the Lord would run and be glorified, and (2) that they may be delivered from aberrant and wicked men.

Regarding the word run, remember, in the Bible it is very common to refer to our lives as walking. For example, the apostle John said, **“And this is love, that we should walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it”** (Second John 1:6).

Paul wanted the word of the Lord to run. That means he wanted the word of the Lord to swiftly spread and grow in the hearts of men. That way it would be glorified, just as it was glorified in the church at Thessalonica. And it should be glorified by all of us.

He also asked to be delivered from aberrant and wicked men. Most sinners are simply foolish in their spiritual lives. Aberrant and wicked men are the minority, but they are also the most dangerous and destructive to righteousness. They were the kinds of men that actively persecuted Paul and the other apostles and evangelists. And we too must beware of such men.

Paul reminded the disciples at Thessalonica that the faith was not of all men. There is always the danger that as we live and associate together as brothers in the Lord, we will forget that not all men have faith in Christ and can be trusted. We must always be prudent and cautious about those who have not proven themselves to be trustworthy.

But Paul said that as long as we remain faithful to the Lord, he will be faithful to us. And he will establish us and keep us from evil. He will make us to be settled and secure in our faith and hope. And he will keep us from any kind of evil that would threaten our faith and hope. In this life, no man is kept from every evil, but the Lord will keep us from any evil against our eternal spirit. He will protect and preserve it for our new life in heaven.

## Paul was confident about them

- **And we are persuaded in the Lord toward you, that what we command you, ye both are doing and will do. And may the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God, and to the steadfastness of the Christ (Second Thessalonians 3:4-5).**

Paul and his co-workmen had great love and faith in the disciples at Thessalonica. They were confident of their obedience to the commands of Christ. For those were the commands that were given to them by Paul and his co-workmen. Notice the emphasis on continued obedience to the commands of Christ. The doctrine of salvation by faith only is a

false one because a man will lose his soul if he is not steadfast in his obedience to the commands of Christ.

Christ is our Lord, and Paul called upon him to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians (1) to the love of God, and (2) to the steadfastness of the Christ. And those things that Paul called upon the Lord for the Thessalonians applies to us as well. Namely, that the Lord will direct our hearts to the love of God, and to the steadfastness of the Christ.

John told us what the love of God is, when he said, **“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we may keep his commandments”** (First John 5:2-3).

The love of God is that we may keep his commandments. And when we keep his commandments then we have the love of God (in its fullest sense, because we are his children). Therefore, Paul called upon the Lord for him to direct our hearts that we may keep God’s commandments.

Paul asked the Lord to help orient our hearts to always obey God’s will for us. God uses his Holy Spirit within us to obey his will. And the way the Holy Spirit works within is by our knowledge of the word of God, and by the character of our conscience. Those things help direct our hearts to the will of God.

Paul also called upon the Lord to direct our hearts to the steadfastness of the Christ. The steadfastness of the Christ refers to his continual obedience to God through every trial, tribulation, and temptation that he faced. And that we too should strive to have that steadfastness.

## Withdrawing from a brother

- **Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for you to withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition, which they received from us** (Second Thessalonians 3:6).

Remember, in the church we only have two ways to apply punishment: to rebuke, and to withdraw our fellowship. What Paul commanded here about withdrawing from a brother applies to all of us. He commanded us to withdraw our fellowship from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition. The tradition he meant is our obedience to the truth and righteousness as taught in the good news of Christ.

The word disorder is only used in this part of Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, and in no other part of the Bible. Paul explains what he meant by a brother walking disorderly in the next few passages.

## Necessary to imitate

- **For ye yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us. Because we did not act disorderly among you, nor did we eat bread gratis from any man, but in labor and toil, working night and day in order not to burden any of you.**

**Not because we have no right, but that we might give ourselves an example to you, in order to imitate us** (Second Thessalonians 3:7-9).

What Paul meant by walking disorderly was not laboring, but instead eating the bread of the labor of other men. Living that way is disorderly because it undermines the order of society. It undermines the order of society because it is unjust. And being unjust it erodes the trust and unity of people by arousing feelings of resentment. It also arouses resentment because it adds to the burdens of those who do labor. Who among you wants to labor extra just to support a lazy man?

Paul reminded the brothers at Thessalonica how it was necessary to imitate Paul and his co-workmen, who did not act disorderly among them in any way. Indeed, they labored and toiled night and day in order not to burden any of them. Although they had the right to be supported by the Thessalonians for their evangelism there, instead they labored night and day to support themselves. And the reason was to give the disciples there an example, so that they would imitate Paul and his co-workmen. The example was to toil and labor to avoid being a burden to any of them.

### Let him not eat who will not work

- **For even when we were with you we commanded you this, that if any man will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some who walk among you disorderly, not working at all, but being busybodies** (Second Thessalonians 3:10-11).

The commands that Paul gave were the commands of God. And Paul commanded the disciples at Thessalonica about how to treat those who walk disorderly among them. The first command we read about in this letter was for them to withdraw from those who walk disorderly among them. And now in this second command, he says that if any man will not work, neither let him eat.

Remember, those commands are commands of God, and they are for every congregation of Christ. With the rise of welfarism in the modern world there is the idea that everyone deserves to eat, whether he works or not. That is in direct contradiction to what Paul commanded.

Paul also told how those who walked disorderly by not working at all were also busybodies. A busybody is someone who goes about meddling in other peoples affairs. Busybodies by definition do no good, but only cause trouble.

### Work with quietness

- **Now to such men we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that, working with quietness, they should eat their own bread** (Second Thessalonians 3:12).

Most of us work quietly and eat our own bread. However, for those who do not, Paul commanded and exhorted them. And he did so by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. For those who refuse, we are commanded to withdraw from them, because such men do not

belong with us. Of course, if they repent, and begin to work quietly and eat their own bread, then we can bring them back into our fellowship.

What Paul meant by working with quietness was to work without disturbing the peace. Whenever Paul and his co-workmen labored in their evangelism it was with quietness. The enemies of Christ were the men who disturbed the peace, often fomenting riots against Paul and his co-workmen.

## Become not weary doing good

- **But ye, brothers, do not become weary doing good** (Second Thessalonians 3:13).

Every act of doing good involves struggle and labor of some kind. Toil is part of living righteously before God. But as we all know effective labor is not easy. It is part of the curse of Adam: we must survive by the sweat of our face. As Jehovah said to Adam, “**In the sweat of thy face thou shall eat bread ...**” (Genesis 3:19), so too we all must survive in the sweat of our face. We must apply our will to force our bodies to labor. And continued toil produces increasing fatigue and discomfort—weariness.

Consequently, there is the temptation to become weary in doing good. When Paul commanded us not to become weary doing good, he was of course not referring to the natural weariness and fatigue of toil. He was referring to the development of an attitude against doing good because of the labor involved. It is quitting because of the difficulties involved in doing good.

Paul gave the same admonition to the disciples at Galatia, when he said, “**And let us not be weary doing good, for in our own time we will reap, not desponding**” (Galatians 6:9). And God has promised us that if we do not become weary doing good while we are in this life, then he will reward us with eternal life in heaven with him where there will never be any weariness.

## Withdrawing from men who disobey

- **And if any man does not obey our word by this letter, note that man, and do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother** (Second Thessalonians 3:14-15).

Paul earlier told the disciples at Thessalonica to withdraw from every brother among them who walked disorderly and not according to the tradition they received from him and his co-workmen. Now he commands them not to associate with any man who does not obey the word of Paul and his co-workmen given in this letter. Paul said that withdrawing fellowship from such a man will make him ashamed. And that will encourage him to be obedient. If such a man is not ashamed, then he is unworthy of being a disciple of Christ.

That command also applies to us all. We are commanded against tolerating any disobedience to the commands of Christ given by Paul and the other apostles, which have been recorded for us in the words of the New Testament.

Paul said we were not to regard such a man as an enemy. We were simply to admonish him as a brother. Notice how Paul contrasted the way we regard a disobedient brother with how we regard an enemy. We are not to regard our enemies the same way we regard each other. It is foolish and wrong to give our enemies the same kind of love and care that we give each other. We are to love our enemies (the law-abiding ones) in the same sense as we love our neighbors, but not in the same sense that we love those who belong to the body of Christ.

## Calling for a blessing for them

- **Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace through everything in every way. The Lord is with all of you** (Second Thessalonians 3:16).

This is the only place in the Bible that uses the expression “**Lord of peace.**” However, the expression “**God of peace**” is mentioned five times, all in the New Testament. The first place that expression is used is in the book of Romans (see Romans 15:33). Below are the comments I made there about it:

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, after he has given us all the opportunity to become his sons for eternity.

Peace is the absence of conflict and strife. Every righteous man loves peace. Wicked men deliberately destroy peace when they think they can profit from it, but most sinners desire peace. Nevertheless, it is always sin that destroys peace. Like many evil consequences of sin, the destruction of peace sometimes takes time to develop, but it always happens.

The Lord has the power to protect us and bless us such that we can have peace through everything in every way. And that is what Paul called upon God to do for the brothers at the congregation in Thessalonica. We too should call upon God to give all who belong to Christ peace through everything in every way. And one day when this life is over God will give us peace through everything in every way for all eternity.

As Paul often did in his letters, he reminded them that the Lord was with all of them. That is something we should all remember always.

## The mark of Paul's letters

- **The salutation of Paul by my hand, which is a mark in every letter I write this way. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with all of you. Truly** (Second Thessalonians 3:17-18).

Paul said he wrote the closing salutation by his own hand. He did not write the text of the letter, but he did write the closing salutation. And he said it was a mark in every letter he wrote that way. Paul probably had poor vision, which would be why others transcribed his words in the letters.

With Paul the closing salutation was for him like a signature is to us in modern times. It was a mark of his identity as the author. It was proof of its authenticity from him. Hence, during those times before the New Testament was assembled, he provided the church with evidence that the letters were from Paul himself.

Paul ended the letter by again reminding them that the Lord was with them. However, this time he said the grace of Christ was with all of them. It is the loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ that is with us all. His grace is with us because he loves all who love and obey him.

# A Commentary on The First Letter of Paul to Timothy

## Greeting

- **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ according to a commandment of God our Savior, and the Lord Jesus Christ our hope, to Timothy, a genuine child in faith: Grace, mercy, peace, from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (First Timothy 1:1-2).**

Paul said he was an apostle of Christ according to a commandment of God and Christ. Jesus never asked any of the men he chose if they would like to be an apostle of his. He always said to them things like, "Follow me," or "Come behind me." And when Jesus first appeared to Paul it was with a commandment. Here is part of Paul's description of that vision of Jesus he had: **"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.**

**"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 26:14-20).

Notice how Paul referred to God as our Savior, and to Christ as the Lord and our hope. In the New Testament both God and Christ are referred to as our Savior. Jesus became our Savior by living in this life so that he could earn the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. And God became our Savior by sending his Son Jesus Christ into the world with power to enable him to redeem us. Jesus had the quality of his spirit to live without sin, thus earning the right to save us. Our salvation was a joint effort with them.

Paul said that Jesus was our hope. He is our only hope of the salvation of our souls. He is our hope because it is only through him that we can be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins and have the opportunity to become sons of God for eternity.

Paul called Timothy a genuine child in faith. This is the only passage in the Bible that uses the expression **"child in faith."** However, Paul said something similar about Titus near the beginning of his letter to him. He called Titus **"a genuine child according to the common faith ..."** (Titus 1:4).

Being a genuine child in faith probably means the same thing as being a genuine child according to the common faith. As disciples of Christ we are all children of God. We are

his children by faith and in faith. For our faith in Christ saved us so that we could be adopted by God, and our faith keeps us in his salvation.

In the new Testament, calling a grown man a child was often an expression of affection. For example, Jesus appeared to some of his apostles on a beach after his resurrection. And he said (before they recognized him) to those who had been fishing all night, **“Children, have ye anything eatable?”** (John 21:5).

Paul also used that salutation about grace, mercy, and peace being from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord in his second letter to Timothy and in his letter to Titus. Having grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ is a very great blessing. Indeed, grace, mercy, and peace probably includes every blessing.

### Command not to teach something different

- **As I urged thee, while going to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus, so that thou might command certain men not to teach something different, nor to heed myths and endless genealogies, which cause controversies rather than stewardship of God in faith** (First Timothy 1:3-4).

The history of the early church, which is given in the book of Acts, does not record the occasion that Paul spoke about in this passage. Remember however, such things are trivial details that are unimportant for us.

The lesson in that passage is that we should also do as Paul instructed Timothy. Namely, to command certain men not to teaching something different from the authentic good news of Christ. What Paul meant by certain men were those inclined to teach error. Erroneous teachings are like infections in the body. They must not be tolerated. They must be actively opposed. And the weapon we must use is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (see Ephesians 6:17), which now is only found in the Bible.

Paul also commanded Timothy not to heed myths and endless genealogies. The world loves myths. The Jews have invented numerous myths about many things. One of the most destructive of those myths is that God gave other laws that were not recorded in the Bible. Jews call them the oral law, claiming they were handed down by word of mouth. That myth has led them even farther from the will of God.

Even those who claim to believe in Christ have invented myths, especially those of the Catholic Church. The idea of purgatory is one of them. A more modern myth among Protestants is the idea that a powerful man called the antichrist will arise to rule the world and persecute the church at some time in the future.

What Paul meant by endless genealogies probably refer to the diligent practice by the Israelites of keeping careful genealogical records. Those records were needed to keep the identity of their separate tribes. All tribal land had to remain in the hands of the same tribal members. Also the priesthood could only come from the tribe of Levi, and the high priest could only come from the descendants of Aaron, the original high priest. All of those things were part of the law of Moses. However, that law is no longer in effect. Therefore, such endless genealogies are useless.

Paul warned that myths and genealogies do nothing but cause controversies instead of promoting the stewardship of God in faith. For us as faithful disciples of Christ all myths are to be rejected and genealogies are to be ignored. Our emphasis must be on serving God in faith according to his will, which is revealed to us in the Holy Bible. We serve God because we have faith in him.

I must also warn you that modern theologians have begun confusing the meaning of the word myth by applying it to all of the events in the Bible. They justify themselves by saying their use of the word myth simply refers to the traditional stories of the Bible. However, the common meaning of the word myth is that which is fictitious and not real. Beware of them calling anything in the word of God a myth; it is vicious slander against God's holy testimony.

## The end of the commandment

- **But the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and non-hypocritical faith** (First Timothy 1:5).

What Paul meant by the end of the commandment is the summation of the will of God for us. All of God's commandments can be summarized by our having these three things:

love out of a pure heart  
a good conscience  
non-hypocritical faith.

Love involves both a feeling and a way of behaving. Love is desiring the good of someone else and making an effort for that good. And for our love to please God it must come out of a pure heart. Those who have impure hearts often have love for some others, but that love has ulterior motives. Love out of an impure heart is a selfish love, a love to benefit themselves. Love out of a pure heart seeks to benefit others.

A good conscience means being free from guilt. And being free from guilt means living righteously without sinning. Although none of us have a perfect conscience, nevertheless, we must all have a good conscience and strive for its perfection. Even with guilt we can have a good conscience by striving to recompense our guilt with good deeds. The apostle Paul felt guilty about his former opposition to Christ, but he worked extra hard in an effort to recompense for that early opposition.

It is not enough to only have faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior. Our faith must be non-hypocritical. Faith in and of itself is useless. The Jewish scholars, Pharisees, and lawyers had faith in God, but it was hypocritical. Consequently, Jesus uttered curses against them because of it (see Matthew 23). God hates hypocrisy. Therefore, beware of it.

## Turning aside to empty talk

- **From which some having swerved have turned aside to empty talk, desiring to be law teachers, understanding neither what they say, nor about what they confidently assert** (First Timothy 1:6-7).

Paul said that some had swerved from the essence of God's commandments—love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and non-hypocritical faith—and turned aside to empty talk. They desired to be law teachers, although they understood neither what they were saying nor about what they were confidently asserting.

Proud men commonly puff themselves up in various ways. The men that Paul described here desired to be law teachers. However, they were not only ignorant of the law, but they were blind to their ignorance. Their talk was empty because it was useless.

They did not even understand what they were saying. That often happens when men have just enough knowledge to make them overconfident. That is the reason for the modern proverb, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

Paul said they did not understand what they were confidently asserting. That may refer to interpretations and applications of the law that they were teaching. With their lack of understanding they were probably making foolish and ignorant interpretations and application of the law.

During the time of Christ the Pharisees made many foolish and ignorant interpretations and application of the law. And Jesus often rebuked them because of it. Yet even now the strict observers of Judaism make even more foolish and ignorant interpretations and application of the law. The reason is because they fail to understand the purpose of the law and why God gave it to them until the time of Christ.

### The law was laid down for sinners

- **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).**

Paul said that the law was good, if any man uses it lawfully. The law is good because it promotes righteousness and combats wickedness. But it is only good if it is used lawfully. The law is only good if it is used by righteous men. For the law can actually be used to defeat righteousness and promote wickedness.

The law can be used wrongfully because it is rigid and blind, and is subject to manipulation by crooked lawyers. Therefore, when men are sinful they find ways to use the law to further their sinfulness. That is happening more and more in modern America after the people decided to forsake God and become pagan.

As Paul said, the main purpose of the law is for the lawless and rebellious and other sinners. It is not needed for righteous men. All righteous men need is wisdom about what is right and wrong and the ways to do right and defeat the wrong. Indeed, for righteous men, the law is a burden. It is a burden because of its rigidity and blindness. I speak much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Here is the list of the kinds of sinners that Paul said the law was laid down for:

the lawless and rebellious  
 the irreverent and sinful  
 the impious and profane  
 father killers and mother killers  
 man killers  
 fornicators  
 homosexuals  
 kidnapers  
 liars  
 perjurers

The list that Paul gave of different sinful men is only a sample for illustration. It was not intended to include every kind of sinner, because at the end of that list Paul added, “... **and if there is any other thing contrary to the sound doctrine according to the good news of the glory of the blessed God ...**.”

That sound doctrine of the good news of the glory of the blessed God consists of the teachings and the examples of Jesus Christ. And it includes what Paul said was the end of the commandment: love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and non-hypocritical faith.

Remember, Paul was entrusted with that good news when Jesus appeared to him in a vision on the road to Damascus. Paul said that good news was of the glory of the blessed God. It is his glory because of many reasons. It proves the moral and spiritual superiority of his Son Jesus Christ. It defeated his great adversary Satan and all of God’s enemies (although God is still allowing them to operate in the world for a while). It has enabled all men who believe and obey him to have the hope of becoming his sons for eternity in heaven.

### Paul went from opposing to serving

- **And I have gratitude to the Christ—Jesus our Lord—who empowered me, because he considered me faithful, having placed in service the man who was formerly blasphemous, and a persecutor, and an aggressor. But I obtained mercy because I did it being ignorant in unbelief** (First Timothy 1:12-13).

Jesus empowered Paul when he called him to be an apostle. He empowered him with divinely inspired knowledge of the word of God, and with the ability to perform signs and wonders to prove that the good news of Christ was from God. Jesus empowered Paul and placed him in service because he considered him faithful. Paul was never a wicked man. He persecuted the church zealously because of his love for God. He was simply misled by his unbelief. Christ considered him faithful because his conscience was always faithful to God.

Paul said he was formerly blasphemous, and a persecutor, and an aggressor. Here is how he described himself when he was being tried before king Agrippa: “**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).

And yet Paul received mercy from God because he did it being ignorant in unbelief. And God will be merciful to every sinner who acts ignorantly in unbelief whose heart is right. However, merely being ignorant and non-believing is not enough. If a man hates truth and righteousness, God will keep him in ignorance and unbelief so that he will be condemned.

Remember this passage about that: **“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).

The most essential part of any man is the character of his spirit. That determines how God will react to him. Solomon spoke of the importance of a man’s character when he said, **“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life”** (Proverbs 4:23). If you pervert your spirit into an evil one there will be no hope for you.

## The overflowing grace of our Lord

- **And the grace of our Lord was filled to overflowing with the faith and love in Christ Jesus** (First Timothy 1:14).

Paul said he obtained mercy by the grace of our Lord. Paul said, moreover, that the grace was filled to overflowing. Our Lord filled Paul to overflowing with the faith and love in Christ Jesus. And that happened when he empowered him as an apostle, because Paul had no faith and love in Christ before that.

Men vary in the strength of their faith. And that strength depends upon two things: (1) it depends upon how much faith the Lord grants to a man, and (2) it depends on how receptive a man is to that faith. For no man can have any faith who is not humble and open-minded. And how much of the faith a man develops depends upon his own strength of character, and the quality of his spirit.

Consider what the Bible says about the faith of Abraham when he was told that he would have a son in his old age: **“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"** (Romans 4:19).

Abraham was not weak in his faith because he had created a high quality spirit within him. Every man has the potential to create a high quality spirit with a strong character within him. But, like having a strong body, it is not easy.

The Lord's grace also filled Paul to overflowing with love in Christ Jesus. As men vary in the strength of their faith, so also they vary in the degrees of their love. And the Lord filled Paul with an overflowing love in Christ Jesus.

Remember however, just as the strength of a man's faith depends upon how much the Lord grants to him plus his receptiveness to it, so also the degree of a man's love in Christ depends upon both how much the Lord grants to him and his receptiveness to it.

Paul received those things to overflowing from God because he was extremely receptive to them. Paul was so receptive to them because he already had a powerful love for God. He had just been greatly misled about Christ and his good news.

## Christ came to save sinful men

- **Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinful men, of whom I am foremost** (First Timothy 1:15).

The saying that Paul said was faithful and worthy of all acceptance, is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinful men. That means he came to save men from their sins, because all men have sinned. Jesus came into this world so that he could qualify to redeem from the condemnation of their sins all who believe and obey him, thus removing the power of the devil to condemn us.

Before Christ the devil kept demanding that God condemn us because of our guilt. But Jesus took away our guilt when he redeemed us. For the book of Revelation says, **"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).

The book of Hebrews tells how it was necessary for Jesus to come into the world: **"Since therefore the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might make him who has the power of death impotent, that is, the devil"** (Hebrews 2:14).

Paul said he himself was the foremost of sinful men because of how he persecuted the church, which is the body of Christ on the earth. No man during the time of the early church persecuted the church as severely as Paul did. Hence, he judged himself the foremost of sinful men.

## Paul's example of how Christ can save

- **But because of this I obtained mercy, so that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life** (First Timothy 1:16).

Paul said he obtained mercy so that Christ might show forth all longsuffering for even the foremost of sinners. Paul was an example showing forth the longsuffering of Christ. And that longsuffering was **“for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life.”** That means no man should think he is beyond the salvation of Christ—as long as he makes his heart right.

As the example of Paul shows, Christ can save even the foremost of sinners whose heart is right. Remember however, no man can receive the salvation of Christ unless he does what Paul did. Namely, repent of his sins, be immersed in water for the remission of them, and live the rest of his life in obedience to Christ.

## Honor and glory to the King of the ages

- **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).

That is one of the most beautiful passages of the Bible. It is extremely concise, yet full of meaning. It lists four aspects of the divinity of God:

he is the King of the ages  
 he is immortal  
 he is invisible  
 he is alone wise.

Being the King of the ages means he is and always will be the supreme authority. He deserves to be the supreme authority because with his mighty power he created everything and sustains everything.

Being immortal means he has always existed and always will. His existence is eternal. That is a great mystery. But it is only one of many mysteries about him that we are incapable of understanding.

Being invisible means he is invisible to us in the world. He keeps himself invisible to test our souls. However, in the afterlife when we will live with him in the new Jerusalem, we will see him as he is. For the apostle John said, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2). Unrepentant sinners will never see him.

Being alone wise means he alone is perfectly wise. Since he created everything both in heaven and on the earth then he knows everything about everything. Moreover, he alone knows how to manage everything so that everything functions right. He alone knows how to prevent all conflict and keep everything united together. He alone knows what is best for us.

Those and many other reasons are why we should always trust him alone. And when I say him alone I am including his Son Jesus Christ because they are one in a perfect spiritual union. Therefore, we must give him honor and glory into the ages of the ages. For he is our life. Truly.

## War the good warfare

- **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 (First Timothy 1:18).**

What Paul meant by “this command” were all of the instructions he gave to Timothy in this letter. That “command” Paul set before him was according to the prophecies leading the way for him. Those prophecies were given to chosen men by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and they comprise the word of God for us, the record of which is now in the Holy Bible.

Paul said those prophecies were leading the way for Timothy, so that by them he might war the good warfare. Those same words, which are now holy scripture, lead the way of every disciple of Christ. They were not given just for Timothy or for the men of those times. They were given for all men for all times to lead us to the right way that we should live. However, that means leading us in the right direction, not to a single specific path to take.

And those prophecies were given so that by them we might war the good warfare. The words of the Bible were given so that we can learn things like (1) why we exist, (2) what is the purpose of our lives, and (3) what is the will of God for us. Such knowledge will equip us with the ability to war the good warfare.

There is good war and there is bad war. Good wars are those that are fought to defeat evil so that peace and righteousness can be established. When America fought in World War II our leaders proclaimed it was for freedom and democracy. They were wrong. We won the war because it was for truth and righteousness, and against evil and deceit. Freedom is a consequence of truth and righteousness, and democracy is a political system that only works when a people are for truth and righteousness.

Regarding our warfare, the good warfare of the church of Christ is a spiritual warfare using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (see Ephesians 6:17). As Paul said to the congregation at Ephesus, **“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 6:11-12). We fight with truth to combat the deceit of the powerful enemies of God, who lead men astray.

## Hold faith and a good conscience

- **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 1:19-20).

Our existence as disciples of Christ demands that we hold firm our faith in him and keep a good conscience. Both are absolutely necessary to retain our salvation. Our faith involves the orientation of our heart to put our trust in him, and our good conscience requires us to continue obeying his commands and always do right.

Paul said that some had put away their faith and their good conscience, and made shipwreck about the faith. He did not mean they made shipwreck of their own faith, because they had already put that away from them. They made shipwreck the teachings of the authentic good news of Christ, which is the faith. Incidentally, that expression “the faith” is used more times in this book than any other book in the Bible. Our faith in Christ is truly the faith, the one and only true faith in God and his truth and righteousness.

Those men were corrupting and destroying the truth of it. They did not corrupt and destroy the genuine good news of Christ. They portrayed a corrupted version of it. The ideas they proclaimed about the good news were a shipwrecked version. Paul explained more about that in his second letter to Timothy: **“But shun profane babblings, for they will advance to greater impiety, and their word will have a feeding field like gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who missed the mark about the truth, saying the resurrection happened already, and they overthrow the faith of some”** (Second Timothy 2:16-18).

Paul said he delivered those two men to Satan so that they would be disciplined not to blaspheme. That does not mean Satan would discipline them not to blaspheme. It means their suffering from the oppressions of Satan would serve to discipline them not to blaspheme.

Satan does oppress people. For Peter mentioned that when he was telling Cornelius the centurion about Jesus. Peter said, **“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 10:38). However, God gives us some shelter from the oppressions of Satan. Otherwise, Satan would destroy us utterly.

Hymenaeus is only mentioned in Paul’s two letters to Timothy. There were four different men named Alexander who are mentioned in the New Testament. One was the father of Rufus, the man who was commanded to carry the cross of Jesus (see Matthew 15:21). Another man was mentioned as belonging to the family of the high priests (see Acts 4:6). Another man named Alexander was mentioned by Paul in his second letter to Timothy. That man was a coppersmith who did many evil things to Paul (see Second Timothy 4:14).

Another man named Alexander was an ally of Paul. He is mentioned in the description of the riot at Ephesus provoked by Demetrius the silversmith because of Paul’s opposition to idols. The passage says, **“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”** (Acts 19:33).

Whether that Alexander at Ephesus who wanted to defend Paul is the same man whom Paul told Timothy he delivered to Satan is not known. Many have conjectured he was, but

there is no evidence in the Bible either way. If that was important for us to know then Paul would have told it.

The lesson for us about Hymenaeus and Alexander is that men can put away their faith and conscience, and make shipwreck about the faith. They were not the last men who abandoned the authentic good news of Christ and turned against it. There will always be betrayers in this world of sin, even among those who become disciples of Christ.

## Pray for all men

- **I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men, for kings and all those who are in prominence, so that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and propriety** (First Timothy 2:1-2).

A supplication is making a humble request. A prayer is speaking to God. An intercession is to speak in behalf of someone else. Giving thanks is expressing appreciation. Most of our supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be in our prayers to God. However, there may be times when it is appropriate and helpful to make supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings to others.

We can make supplications, prayers, and thanksgivings for ourselves. Only intercessions necessarily involve others. Nevertheless, Paul exhorted us to do all of those things for all men, including kings and those who are in prominence.

All of those things are intended to be helpful. And by doing them for all men expresses our love for them. Not only would those things benefit other men, but Paul said the effect on us would help us live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and propriety.

When other men see evidence that we love them, they are less inclined to trouble us. And that will make it easier for us to live right. Piety (being loyal and devoted to God) and propriety (doing things that are fitting and proper) are both aspects of righteousness.

Remember however, there will always be exceptions. There is no evidence in the Bible that any righteous soul ever made supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings for any evil wicked man. Remember, Jesus even refused to speak to the evil king Herod (see Luke 23:8-9).

Paul mentioned specifically that we do those things for kings (in general) and all those who are in prominence. It is especially important that we do those things for them because so much of our peace and tranquility depends upon those offices of authority.

## God wants all men to be saved

- **For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth** (First Timothy 2:3-4).

Paul said that making supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings for all men is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. It is good and acceptable in his sight because he wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth.

God desires that all men repent of their sins, and believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. God desires that even wicked men repent. For example, when God sent his prophet Ezekiel to warn his people Israel, he said to them, **“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). God only blinds the eyes of men who have hardened their hearts.

God also wants all men (those not completely hardened) to come to knowledge of truth. In the Bible the word truth refers to all the ways of doing that which is good and right and just. Jesus said several things that illustrate this meaning. For examples, he said, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6). He said about his apostles, in his prayer during the time of the last supper, **“Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is truth”** (John 17:17).

And when Jesus was being accused by the Jews after his betrayal, Pilate the governor asked him if he were a king. Jesus replied **“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”** (John 18:37). That is the truth that God wants all men to have knowledge of.

The word truth is used two hundred and twenty-five times in the Bible. For the Bible is the word of God, and God loves truth. Indeed, the psalmist spoke of God as being God of truth: **“Thou have redeemed me, O Jehovah, thou God of truth”** (Psalm 31:5). Another psalmist said about him. **“The works of his hands are truth and justice. All his precepts are sure. They are established forever and ever. They are done in truth and uprightness”** (Psalm 111:7-8).

## One God and one mediator

- **For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all, the testimony for their own times** (First Timothy 2:5-6).

Notice how Paul contrasted the **“one God”** from the **“one mediator of God and man,”** which is the man Jesus Christ. And in heaven the man Jesus Christ continues to be the mediator of God and man. The teaching that Jesus is the one God is false. The oneness of God includes his Son Jesus Christ because of their perfect spiritual unity.

Christ mediates with God on our behalf because we now belong to him, having given himself as a ransom for all. A ransom is payment to redeem or buy back something in debt. We were in debt to God because of our offenses against him. And our debts required us to be condemned to hell. I conjecture in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity* about how that debt is paid in hell by those who refuse to be redeemed by Christ.

However, for those who are his disciples, having been redeemed by him, he is our mediator with God. He is our mediator because he reconciles us to God. As Paul said, **“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). Christ reconciles us to God when we live as a faithful disciple to him.

What Paul means by **“the testimony for their own times”** is that the man Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a testimony to us about how we can be reconciled to God. The life of Christ in the world not only served to qualify him as our Redeemer, but it also gave us testimony about God and the way of our reconciliation with him.

And Christ gave mankind that testimony while we have the opportunity to be ransomed by him. For if a man does not allow Christ to ransom him during his life here on the earth (the man’s own time in whatever generation he lives), he will never be ransomed. And that is true of all of us, meaning our **“own times”** in this world of testing. Every man not ransomed in his lifetime here he will be required to pay in full his debts to God in the fires of hell with the devil and the demons.

## A herald, an apostle, a teacher of Gentiles

- **For which I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie), a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth** (First Timothy 2:7).

A herald is a man who makes a public declaration or proclamation about something, which usually involves some kind of news. Paul said he was appointed by Christ to be a herald of his good news of our salvation. The good news is that Christ can redeem us from the condemnation of our sins and reconcile us to God, enabling us to become sons of God for eternity with him in heaven. That is the very best news we could ever hear.

An apostle is a man who is sent on a mission by someone else. Jesus originally appointed twelve apostles, but one of them betrayed him. After Jesus ascended into heaven the remaining eleven cast a lot to choose a replacement for the betrayer. However, sometime later Jesus appeared from heaven to Paul (first called Saul) to appoint him an apostle, especially for the Gentiles.

Having been appointed so much later than the other apostles, and never having been with the Lord while he was on the earth, there were some disciples who doubted that Paul was a genuine apostle. Therefore, it was necessary for him to defend himself, as he does here in this passage by assuring us that he spoke the truth in Christ about his appointment. As further proof of his claim, God gave Paul the power to perform many signs and wonders (See Acts 15:12 and Romans 15:18-19).

Paul did not need to defend his apostleship to Timothy, because Timothy was one of his most faithful helpers. However, because Paul sometimes sent Timothy on missions to some of the congregations, Timothy no doubt needed to defend Paul from his various enemies in them. That is probably why Paul wrote these words in this letter to him, which Timothy could then use to combat charges that Paul was not who he claimed to be. Paul wrote about those enemies in his Second letter to the Corinthians (see 2Co 10-12).

Although Paul did preach to some Jews, he was primarily a teacher of Gentiles. He was a teacher of them in faith and truth. He taught them about the good news of Christ so that

they would develop their faith in Christ. He was also a teacher of truth because the good news of Christ contains truth. Remember, truth includes all the ways of doing righteousness. And Paul's teachings are full of that knowledge.

## How men are to pray

- **I desire therefore the men to pray in every place, lifting up devout hands apart from anger and argument** (First Timothy 2:8).

Paul's desire that the men pray in every place was not a personal desire. He was speaking on behalf of the desire of God. Paul had earlier exhorted Timothy that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men. And that exhortation was not personal either.

Paul now says he desires all men to pray in every place. Paul also said to the brothers at Thessalonica, **"Pray without ceasing"** (First Thessalonians 5:17). Thus, putting all those words together, we should pray in every place without ceasing for all men everywhere. There are no limits to our praying. Of course, that cannot ordinarily be done openly. However, we can always speak to God in our hearts because his Holy Spirit in us is our escort and guide through this dark and troubled world.

We cannot literally pray in every place even in our hearts, but we can always keep God in the background of our thinking. We can always include him in our thinking, even when we are doing mundane things. If we can talk to ourselves when we are doing things, then we can certainly include him in our thoughts. And that is a form of praying to him.

When the Bible speaks of lifting up hands it is usually figurative for doing something. In this case Paul is commanding us to be devout, and to be without anger and argument when we do things. Being devout means being serious and respectful. Therefore lifting up devout hands means doing things in a serious and respectful way. Acting frivolously or contemptuously is not what God wants of us.

Paul also said we should do things apart from anger and argument. Becoming angry is a natural feeling to being offended, and there is nothing wrong with it. Remember, the Bible speaks of God sometimes being angry. For example, Solomon spoke of God's anger when he warned against not keeping your vows to him: **"Why should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?"** (Ecclesiastes 5:5-6). The problem with the anger of men is that it often leads to sin. Paul warned about that when he said, **"Be ye angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath ..."** (Ephesians 4:26).

With regard to arguments, they are a kind of verbal fighting or combat. Jesus often debated and reasoned with the Jews, including with his enemies. However, he never engaged in arguments. It is right and good to reason and debate about some disagreement, but not to argue. Arguments are controlled more by emotions than by reason. And as children of God we are to always behave wisely and intelligently in a spirit of love and goodwill.

## How women are to adorn themselves

- **And similarly, the women to adorn themselves in disciplined decorum, with reverence and sobriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive apparel, but (which is fitting for women professing godliness) through good works** (First Timothy 2:9-10).

Unlike men, it is natural for women everywhere to be very conscious about how they look. In fact, it is abnormal when they are not; it is even freakish. Therefore, it is natural for them to want to adorn themselves to look prettier. And that is certainly not wrong. It only becomes wrong when it is excessive. Paul said that Christian women were to adorn themselves in disciplined decorum. Being disciplined means being restrained and well controlled. Thus, the decorum of Christian women should be restrained and well controlled.

Paul said it should also be with reverence and sobriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive apparel. In other words, the adornment of Christian women should not be extravagant and gaudy. He was not condemning the use of any kind of hair style, jewelry, or apparel. He was condemning the use of elaborate and expensive things to wear, expensive in the sense of being very costly.

For in times of great prosperity, things that were once expensive often become commonly affordable. For example, during the prosperous times of king Solomon, the Bible says, **“And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars he made to be as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland, for abundance”** (First Kings 10:27).

The focus of women who profess godliness should be to adorn themselves with reverence and sobriety through good works. Outward adornments make a woman look prettier to other people. But the adornment of reverence and sobriety through good works makes them more pleasing to God.

Incidentally, this is the only place in the Bible that uses the Greek word that means godliness. It means being God-like, and that is what every disciple of Christ should strive to be in the quality of their spirit.

## Women are to learn in silence

- **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** (First Timothy 2:11-12).

As children of God, Christian women are not to teach a man or have the authority of a man among ourselves. Indeed, they are not even permitted to speak in our assemblies. For Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **“As in all the churches of the sanctified, let the women keep silent in the churches. For it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be subordinate, as the law also says. And if they want to learn anything, let them question their own husbands at home, for it is an ugly thing for women to speak in an assembly”** (First Corinthians 14:34-35).

The subservient role of women has been God’s plan from the time of Eve. For the scripture says, **“To the woman he [Jehovah] said, I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy**

**childbearing, in pain thou shall bring forth children. And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee**" (Genesis 3:16). Paul also said to the brothers at Corinth, **"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).

The headship of men over women has always been the will of God for us. And everything goes better when we live according to his will. However, the world is filled with sinners who ignore God's will. Consequently, the relationship between men and women in God's genuine kingdom contrasts greatly with that of the world.

For example, in pagan America women have been given complete equality with men. The result has been that marriages have become less common and are more troubled. Perverse sexual practices have increased, and effective child rearing has declined so that children have become more unruly and lawless.

Of course, it should be understood that Paul was speaking about the teaching and authority of adults. For an important duty of women everywhere is to teach children and to rule over them, boys and girls alike. And of course, the command for women to learn in silence in all subjection refers to whenever disciples of both genders are assembled together in the name of Christ. When Christian women are gathered together with no men present, they are certainly permitted to teach each other.

For example, Paul commanded the aged women to teach the younger women: **"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).

Moreover, it is probably permitted for a Christian woman to teach and have the authority of a man among the affairs of the world, outside of the kingdom of God. For example, there were a few times mentioned in the Old Testament when God allowed a woman to have the authority of a man. Here is one of them: **"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time"** (Judges 4:4).

Ideally, because of their subordinate relationship with men, no woman would teach a man or have the authority of a man. However, this is a sinful world where God's will is not done. And as God once allowed divorce, even though he did not want it, so there may be times when a woman teaching a man or having the authority of a man may be acceptable in relationships outside of the membership of the church, just as with the matter of swearing (see my comments about Matthew 5:34).

## Adam and Eve

- **For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, having been deceived, became in transgression** (First Timothy 2:13-14).

God first formed the man Adam, and then he formed the woman Eve from a rib taken from the body of Adam. God made the woman to be a help meet for man. For the scripture says,

**“And Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make a help meet for him”** (Genesis 2:18). Therefore, Paul said to the Corinthians, **“For also man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man”** (First Corinthians 11:9).

Not only was the woman formed after man to be a help meet for him, but she was deceived by the serpent while the man was not. Eve sinned because she was deceived. Adam sinned because he listened to Eve instead of Jehovah. Eve was deceived because it is the nature of women to be more vulnerable to deception.

God made men and women so that it is best for women to be subservient to men. And everything works much better when the men hearken to God and obey him, and the women hearken to righteous men and obey them.

## How they will be saved

- **But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety** (First Timothy 2:15).

When Paul said she will be saved, he was referring to womankind. When he said she would be saved through childbearing, he was referring to the God given role of womankind. God designed and created the body of womankind for the very purpose of bearing and rearing children. That is a major difference between the bodies of men and the bodies of women. The other major difference relates to the subservience of women to men. Their bodies are weaker and softer, and they are more easily deceived.

Paul is not saying that every woman must bear children. Paul never married, and remember what he said to the Corinthians about marriage: **“For I wish all men to be even as myself. However each man has his own gift from God, one in this way, and another after that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they have no self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn”** (First Corinthians 7:7-9).

But whether a Christian woman marries and bears children or not, Paul said she must continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety. She must continue that way because we must all continue that way. We must continue in those things forever, both in this life and the next one.

We will need to continue our faith in God even in heaven, because faith includes trust. And we must always trust God. We must of course continue in love, because the apostle John said, **“Beloved, we should love each other. Because love is of God, and every man who loves has been begotten of God, and knows God”** (First John 4:7). And we must continue in sanctification because sanctification means being pure and holy and set apart from the uncleanness of sin.

And we must continue in all those things with sobriety, which means being sober, serious, and resolute. Solomon said there was a time to laugh (see Ecclesiastes 3:4), but we should always be sober minded. There is never a time for folly among those who belong to our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Qualifications of overseers

- **Faithful is the saying, If any man aspires to supervision, he desires a good work. The overseer therefore must be blameless, the husband of one wife, sober, serious minded, disciplined, loving strangers, able to teach, no drunkard, not a fighter, not greedy of base gain, but gentle, noncontentious, no lover of money, a man who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all propriety (but if any man knows not how to rule his own house, how will he take care of a congregation of God?), not a new convert, lest having been puffed up he may fall into the condemnation of the devil. And he must also have good testimony from those outside, lest he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (First Timothy 3:1-7).**

Paul is here referring to men who are responsible for overseeing and supervising the activities of a congregation of the church. They are called overseers because they oversee the activities of a congregation. They are also called elders because they must be older men with more experience in life and more wisdom to know how to oversee.

Except for the word of God itself, the Bible, the word of God, authorizes no higher authority in the church beyond the overseers. Moreover, the Bible does not authorize one man alone to oversee or supervise a congregation. For it always speaks of them in the plural. Higher offices such as that of a Bishop were invented by ambitious and aggressive men against the will of God for us.

In the above passage Paul gave many qualifications required of an overseer, which I list below:

- blameless
- the husband of one wife
- sober
- serious minded
- disciplined
- loving strangers
- able to teach
- no drunkard
- not a fighter
- not greedy of base gain
- gentle
- noncontentious
- no lover of money
- a man who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all propriety
- not a new convert
- having a good testimony from those outside

Being blameless means being free of guilt. As disciples of Christ we have all been freed from the condemnation of our sins by the redemption of Christ. However, there are times when a disciple may offend God and become guilty. Such a man must then repent and bear fruit worthy of repentance. An overseer must not have any such guilt over him.

The qualification of being the husband of one wife involves other issues besides that of polygyny. It involves questions of divorce, separation, or the death of a wife. Since the good news of Christ is not a legal system, then individual judgments would need to be made about how any of those variables might effect the fitness of a man to be an overseer. Actually, each man needs to be evaluated individually about all of these requirements.

Being sober and serious minded refer to the quality of a man's spirit. No man who clowns or acts frivolously could qualify. Being sober and serious minded is something we should all do as children of God. And it is especially important for men who oversee the affairs of the churches.

Being disciplined refers to having self-control and acting in an orderly fashion. It also refers to the ability of a man to be obedient to a higher authority, in this case the authority of God and his holy word.

God has always desired us to have love for strangers. In fact, there is a command in the law of Moses that required it: **“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).

Being apt to teach means having both the knowledge and the ability to teach others. That does not mean the man must always engage in teaching, but he should be able whenever there was a need for him. However, that requirement does not necessarily mean being able to teach groups, because many men are better able to teach individuals instead of groups.

The requirement that the man not be a drunkard refers to excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages. It does not mean their use is forbidden entirely. Nevertheless, it is wise for an overseer to forsake the consumption of them, because they can impair a man's mind. For that reason, the law of Moses commanded the high priests against drinking any alcoholic beverage when they were serving the tabernacle, and later the temple.

The passage about that says, **“And Jehovah spoke to Aaron, saying, Drink no wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tent of meeting, that ye not die—it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations— and that ye may make a distinction between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and that ye may teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah has spoken to them by Moses”** (Leviticus 10:8-11).

King Lemuel, who was quoted in the book of Proverbs, also warned against rulers drinking alcoholic beverages, when he said, **“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for rulers to say, Where is strong drink? Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to any who is afflicted”** (Proverbs 31:4-5).

Paul also said an overseer should not being a fighter. Fighters are men who are aggressive and combative. And that is not how disciples of Christ should be. Paul suffered much opposition and persecution, but he was not a fighter. He always sought reconciliation. Only on rare occasions did he fight back while defending the good news of Christ. And the Bible only records one situation when Jesus became aggressive. That was when he cast out the moneychangers from the temple (see Matthew 21:12-13 and John 2:14-15).

An overseer must also not be greedy of base gain. Greed is excessive desire. Jesus warned against all greed, when he said, **“Watch, and keep away from greed, because to any man, life to him is not in the abundance of things possessed by him”** (Luke 12:15). Greed is always selfish.

Why Paul specifically mentioned base gain is not clear. Perhaps he was emphasizing the fact that greed is always about a strong desire for base gain of any kind, whether it is about material things or not. A man can have a strong desire for doing good, but we do not call that greed.

Being gentle means not being rough or harsh. It means treating things softly and tenderly. That is how we treat things we love, and that is how we should treat other people, especially those who oversee others.

A contentious man is quarrelsome, easily provoked to anger and hostility. And if any of the overseers of a congregation of disciples of Christ were that way it would result in strife and division among the members, and he would drive away many of them. Contentiousness in leadership is fatal to the unity of any group (that has any freedom).

An overseer of a congregation cannot be a lover of money. As Paul said later in this letter, **“For the love of money is a root of all the evils, of which some aspiring have wandered from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows”** (First Timothy 6:10). No disciple of Christ should be a lover of money, because the book of Hebrews says, **“The Way of life is to be without love of money, being content with the things that are present, for he has said, I will, no, not leave thee, and also, I will, no, not forsake thee”** (Hebrews 13:5).

The next qualification says that an overseer must be **“a man who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all propriety.”** Paul then asked the question, **“... but if any man knows not how to rule his own house, how will he take care of a congregation of God?”** Every man should rule his own house well, but not every man does. There are some men who do not rule their house at all. In those cases it is usually the wife who is the head of the house, and that is a perversion.

Ruling a house well includes having the children in subjection with all propriety. The sinners of my country have made that much more difficult. The entertainment and communication businesses have poisoned people’s minds about it. They commonly portray children as wiser and more righteous than fathers. Moreover, our sinful rulers keep adding laws against the authority of fathers. It is part of the spiritual degeneracy of America.

Notice how Paul said the children should be in subjection with all propriety. That means the children should be managed properly. For there are evil ways to keep children in subjection. It is not just the results that are important, but also how the results occur.

The last two qualification that Paul mentioned include warnings about the devil and falling. The first one says the man cannot be a new convert. For there is too much risk that he might become puffed up with pride. And then he would fall into the condemnation of the devil. Pride may have been what caused the devil to become what he is, the great enemy of God, and that deserves condemnation. Pride has caused the condemnation of many men. Oppose pride like the deadly vice that it is.

The last qualification says that the overseer must have a good testimony from those outside. Otherwise he might fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Having a good testimony from those outside means having a good reputation in the world as a righteous man. Even those who persecuted Paul could not accuse him of being an unrighteous man, except for his teachings which they opposed.

A man with a bad reputation in the world is vulnerable to falling into reproach and the snare of the devil. That means he is easily slandered and condemned by people. The Greek word for devil literally means slanderer. He is called slanderer because he was constantly accusing us to God before Jesus redeemed our souls. He can no longer do that with God, but he does it whenever he has the occasion among men.

Therefore, a man who had developed a bad reputation in the world, although he repented and became a Christian, could not become an overseer because of that reputation. Of course, his reputation could change with time, and then he could be considered.

Now I need to mention that the qualification to have a good testimony from those outside does not mean good testimony from everyone. For Jesus said, **“Woe when men will speak well of you, for their fathers did in the same way to the false prophets”** (Luke 6:26). Consider the apostle Paul himself. He was often maligned by Jews. Below is an example from when he was being tried before the Roman governor Felix:

**“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). Nevertheless, Paul was seen as a righteous man by the great majority of the Gentiles. And he was not maligned by most of the Jewish population.

Regarding this list of qualifications of elders, Paul gave a similar list of the qualifications of elders in the first part of his letter to Titus. In my commentary of that letter I compare the two lists. They are the only lists in the Bible that give the qualifications of elders.

## Qualifications of helpers

- **Helpers likewise, be honorable, not double-tongued, not attending to much wine, not greedy of base gain, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proven, then being blameless, let them serve** (First Timothy 3:8-10).

The Greek word for helper is transliterated deacon. Consequently, the office of helper in the church is also called deacon. As with the elders, Paul also gave qualifications for the helpers of a congregation, which I list below:

honorable  
 not double-tongued  
 not attending to much wine  
 not greedy of base gain  
 holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience  
 let these also first be proven

Being honorable means living uprightly and nobly. Thus, being worthy of receiving honor and respect. An honorable man is one who is recognized as having good character. An honorable man is one we can trust.

Being double-tongued means having speech that is untrustworthy. It means a man who speaks one way at one time, then another way at another time. It means a man who tells one man one thing, but another man another thing about the same things. No disciple of Christ should ever be double-tongued. Jesus sometimes spoke riddles, but he was never double-tongued. He often spoke to the multitudes in parables, but he always explained them to those who asked him.

One of the qualifications of the overseers was that he be no drunkard. That is what Paul meant by saying a helper of a congregation should not be a man who attends to much wine. For it is the excessive consumption of alcohol in the beverage that causes drunkenness. And drunkenness dulls the intellect and causes a man to act like a fool.

Not being greedy of base gain was also given as one of the qualifications of elders of a congregation. A man greedy of base gain has perverted values about what is good and right, and what is the purpose of our lives. Such a man has no place in the kingdom of God, much less holding any kind of office in it.

Paul next said a helper must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Our faith is in the good news of Jesus Christ. And our faith is a mystery to those who have no faith. They neither understand the good news of Christ, nor do they understand our faith in it.

Jesus spoke of how his good news is a mystery to unbelievers when he said to his disciples, **“To you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those outside, all things occur in parables”** (Mark 4:11).

Paul also told how God made known to us the mystery of the good news, when he said, **“I now rejoice in sufferings for you, and make complete in my flesh things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ for his body, which is the church. Of which I became a helper according to the administration of God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery that was hidden from the ages and from the generations, but has now been made known to his sanctified”** (Colossians 1:24-26).

Paul said that a helper of a congregation of Christ must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. We should all strive to keep a pure conscience. A pure conscience is the result of having it cleansed by Christ, which happens when we believe in him, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them. Those who offend God afterwards defile their conscience, and must again repent and do works worthy of repen-

tance. And that disqualifies them from holding any office in the church. At least until they are again proven.

Just as Paul said that a candidate for overseer must not be a new convert, so also a candidate for deacon must first be proven. That means they must first be tested. Testing people and things is something we all do, especially when it involves something important.

There are many services that we can perform in the church without holding the office of elder or deacon. Performing any of those faithfully would be one way for a man to prove himself.

## The wives

- **The wives likewise, be honorable, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things** (First Timothy 3:11).

Paul is here speaking of the wives of men who are the overseers and helpers in a congregation. Of course, all our wives should have those qualities. However, those things are essential in a man's wife before he can hold an office in the church.

Paul earlier said that a man who is a deacon must be honorable. He now says that the wives must also be honorable. Paul earlier said that an overseer must be sober. And he now says that the wives are likewise to be sober.

Paul may have mentioned slanderous in this list about the qualities of wives because gossip seems to be more common among women. And slander often ends up being included in gossip. Being faithful in all things may refer to their continued obedience. Remember, women are to be subservient in the church, and wives are to be subservient to their husbands.

Two of those qualities for wives—not being slanderous and being faithful in all things—were not listed in those for overseers or for helpers. Nevertheless, they are obviously required of them also. The things that Paul listed should not be considered inclusive. They were given as examples of the kind of personal qualities necessary for men holding those important offices.

Remember, the good news of Christ is not a legal system. A man may have all of those virtues Paul gave, but still be unqualified because of some other weakness in his life.

## More on helpers

- **Let helpers be husbands of one wife, ruling children and their own houses well. For those who serve well will acquire to themselves a good standing, and much boldness in the faith in Christ Jesus** (First Timothy 3:12-13).

Both the overseers and the helpers must be a husband of one wife. And they must both rule their own houses well, having children in subjection. The families of men help reveal how well they could serve a congregation as an elder or a deacon. Remember what Paul said earlier about that: **“... but if any man knows not how to rule his own house, how will he take care of a congregation of God?”**

Paul then told how serving a congregation well would cause the helpers to acquire (1) a good standing, and (2) much boldness in the faith in Christ Jesus. A good standing means a good reputation. They would acquire a good standing because their good services would be more easily seen by the congregation.

And they would acquire much boldness in the faith in Christ because they themselves could see the good benefits of their service. Their success in serving would encourage them to be less hesitant in expressing their faith and doing things to promote the good news of Christ. It would give them more confidence and make them bolder in the faith in Christ. Success is always encouraging.

### A house of God is a congregation

- **These things I write to thee, hoping to come to thee sooner, but if I delay, that thou may know how it is necessary to live in a house of God, which is a congregation of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth** (First Timothy 3:14-15).

The house of God during the times of the Old Testament was first the tabernacle during the travels of the sons of Israel in the wilderness before they entered the promised land. Then it was the temple in Jerusalem after they settled in the land. Here is one passage about the temple: **“Now these are the foundations which Solomon laid for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was sixty cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits”** (Second Chronicles 3:3). A cubit was about eighteen inches.

However, the house of God is now different. For Paul said to the disciples at 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). And when Jesus was questioned about the coming of the kingdom of God, he 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). Therefore, since a congregation of God is comprised of disciples of Christ, then it is a house of God.

Paul said that our God is a living God, unlike every other god that men worship. And our God is the pillar and foundation of the truth. All of God’s enemies love deceit and hate the truth. They hate it because it condemns them. But truth is what enables life and creativity. Truth is what enables us to do things that are good and right and just. Our God is the pillar and foundation of the truth, and his Holy Bible is filled with truth. Only unbelievers and scoffers are blind to it.

### The mystery of piety

- **And without controversy great is the mystery of piety. God was manifested in flesh, justified in spirit, seen by agents, proclaimed among nations, believed in the world, taken up in glory** (First Timothy 3:16).

Paul said that piety is a great mystery. And there is no controversy about that because everyone agrees it is a great mystery. Piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness. The very personification of piety is Almighty God himself. And who would dispute

the greatness of the mystery of God. How could God have always existed? How could he have created this vast universe in only six days? How could we be his offspring made in his image? Great are the mysteries about him.

Paul listed six things about God, saying he was

manifested in flesh  
justified in spirit  
seen by agents  
proclaimed among nations  
believed in the world  
taken up in glory

When Paul described those things about God, he was referring to the Son of God, because God's only begotten Son is the **"the exact image of his essence"** (Hebrews 1:3). The Son of God is the exact image of the essence of God. Therefore, when Paul described those things about God, he was speaking about the Son of God.

God, the Son of God, was manifested in flesh through the body of Jesus Christ. Remember this passage about God being manifested to us: **"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?"**

**"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 14:8-11).

The Son of God was born of a virgin and lived as a man in every sense of the word, except, unlike the rest of us, he never sinned. And his sinless life proved his moral and spiritual superiority to every other offspring of God. Thus, justifying his worthiness to reign with God the Father over everyone else. Of course, it was his spirit that was justified, not his body. And in heaven with God he is no longer in the flesh, but has an incorruptible body.

What Paul meant by being seen by agents is not clear. Perhaps it means the life of Christ upon the earth was fully visible to the inhabitants of heaven, or at least some of them. They were allowed to see how he was tempted, how he served God faithfully, how he suffered and died never having sinned. Thus, they could see for themselves how vastly superior in every way that the Son of God is to them, as well as to us.

The Son of God was proclaimed among the nations, not just to Israel the former people of God. He and his good news of salvation have been proclaimed throughout the world. And he was believed in the world because he has disciples in every nation.

And at the end of his successful life here upon the earth, he was taken up in glory. He was first resurrected from the dead. Then after appearing to many of his disciples he ascended into heaven in the sight of some of them. And now he reigns at the right hand of God.

## Prophecying apostasy

- **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, forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods, which God created for partaking with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth** (First Timothy 4:1-3).

The Holy Spirit of God warned Paul that apostasy by some would definitely occur in latter times. By latter times he simply meant sometime in the future. Paul was not referring to any specific time period. Otherwise he would have described such a period. He simply said in latter times. And history has clearly shown the development of apostasy occurred not long after the time of the early church.

There have been many kinds of apostasies by those who claimed to believe in Christ. The authentic church cannot be perverted, but men have created perverse imitations of it. The most prevalent apostasy in ancient times was the Catholic Church, the development of which began soon after the time of the apostles. Evil men created a false church by Romanizing what it should be. And in modern times men have perverted what the church should be by Americanizing it, which is another way of creating imitations of it.

The Spirit mentioned four evils that would accompany the departure from the faith. The Spirit said that some would

give heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons  
 speak lies in hypocrisy  
 forbid to marry  
 abstain from foods

Spirits are energy. And ideas are a kind of spirit created within our minds. (I describe in detail the nature of spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.) What Paul seems to have meant by deceitful spirits was any kind of deceitful thought and idea, especially false ideologies.

Regarding the doctrines of demons, demons are evil spirits. There are men who have corrupted their own spirit into an evil spirit. Also, there are men who allow evil spirits to enter into them, and they allow evil thoughts to develop in their minds. Remember what Paul said about that to the Ephesians: “... **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 2:2).

Deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons are evil thoughts and ideas. The enemies of God are constantly promoting evil thoughts and ideas to corrupt the hearts of men, and Paul said that those who depart from the faith give heed to them. They give heed to them because they not only love evil, but they are deceived.

Paul also said that those who depart from the faith speak lies in hypocrisy. They speak lies and pretend to be righteous so they can prey upon the weak and ignorant. They deceive other people, but they themselves are deceived. For Paul said in his second letter to Timo-

thy, **“But evil men and fakers will go forward to worse, leading astray and being led astray”** (Second Timothy 3:13).

Forbidding to marry and abstaining from foods are examples of departing from the faith and promoting some kind of ascetic legal system instead. Paul spoke of that in his letter to the Colossians: **“If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why do ye submit to rules, as though living in the world? Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch (which are all things for consumption by use), according to the commandments and teachings of men? Which having, are indeed a matter of wisdom in will-worship, and self-mortification, and austerity of the body—not in any value against indulgence of the flesh”** (Colossians 2:20-23). The priests of the Roman Catholic Church are obvious examples, being required to remain unmarried and to take a vow of poverty.

God never forbade marriage for anyone, except for his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, who was sent into the world with a unique mission. Moreover, the restrictions about certain foods in the law of Moses were only temporary because of their lack of knowledge about how to avoid the dangers of them. Jesus removed all those restrictions (see Mark 7:19).

## Every creation of God is good

- **Because every creation of God is good, and nothing rejected that is received with thankfulness, for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer** (First Timothy 4:4-5).

For us, being under the law of liberty with God, there is nothing that God created in the world that is now forbidden (except for eating blood). Of course, we must still use wisdom to know how best to use anything rightly, because there are right and wrong ways to use anything.

That is no doubt what Paul meant by things being received with thankfulness. When we receive things with thankfulness, that means we set them apart for righteousness (sanctified). We use them only for righteousness through our knowledge of the word of God, and through our requests to God for his help. When men do not appreciate God and his blessings they use the things in the world to commit unrighteousness, making them unholy.

One of our duties in the world is to find practical and effective ways to use the things that God created, whatever they may be. For example, maggots and leaches are loathsome creatures that we commonly avoid. However, medical science has discovered they can be effectively used to help some people who have received injuries to their bodies. The maggots remove dead tissue that could introduce infection in the body. And leaches are used to help bring blood to injured parts of the body that are deficient.

Every creation of God is good. It is our duty to find the good in what he has created. And that has been a major goal of modern science and engineering.

## Being a good helper of Christ

- **Laying these things down to the brothers, thou wilt be a good helper of Jesus Christ, reared up in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine that thou have followed** (First Timothy 4:6).

Paul used the expression of laying those things down to the brothers. The Bible tells how good gifts were commonly laid down at the feet of those who were honored. Hence, the good commandments and advice that Paul gave should be used like good gifts which we can present to other brothers in Christ. And that will make us a good helper of Jesus Christ.

Paul said that Timothy had been reared up in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine. Timothy was a disciple before Paul ever met him, because the record says, **“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”** (Acts 16:1-2).

How and when Timothy was converted is never told. However, Timothy was a young man when Paul first met him, and Paul no doubt helped to further rear him up in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine. We all need to be reared up in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine, because we all begin as newborn babes in Christ. As Peter 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).

Our faith is our trust in God and our belief in Christ as the Son of God. The good doctrine is the teachings of Christ that he and his apostles proclaimed and that are recorded for us in the words of the New Testament. It is a good doctrine because it promotes truth and righteousness, and opposes sin and error. There is no better doctrine in the world, nor can there be because it was given to us by our Creator God.

### Piety is profitable in all things

- **But reject the profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself to piety. For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life, and of that which is coming. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance** (First Timothy 4:7-9).

The world is filled with profane and old wives’ fables. Fables are myths and legends. Profane in this context means unholy and irreverent. Thus, profane fables are unholy and irreverent myths and fictitious stories. Ancient Greek mythology is filled with them. The modern motion picture business has and continues to promote many profane fables which they often portray as real. Even their stories about history are filled with fictions and other kinds of deceit. The novels that people write are the same way.

Paul warned us to reject such profane fables. However, those that are presented as motion pictures and novels can be difficult to reject, because they are crafted to appear very appealing and truthful. That makes them especially dangerous for the young. Consequently, we need to continually warn our children, even when they protest about our “ruining” the stories when we expose them. One major evil in those stories is how they commonly glorify sin and wickedness, and demean God and his righteousness.

What Paul means here by old wives’ fables are fanciful stories about religious things. Such stories are also very popular in the world. They are especially prevalent among the

Jews and the Roman Catholics, as Adam Clarke reports in his commentary about the above passage in First Timothy:

This seems to refer particularly to the *Jews*, whose Talmudical writings are stuffed with the most ridiculous and profane fables that ever disgraced the human intellect. It may with equal propriety be applied to the *legends* of the Romish Church. Let any man read the *Aurea Legenda*, and he will find of profane and old wives' fables what may stand, with considerable propriety, column for column with the Talmud. See *Joseline's* Life of St. Patrick for miracles, without rhyme or reason, abundantly more numerous and more stupendous than all the *necessary* ones wrought by Jesus Christ and his apostles. This is enough to persuade a man that the Spirit of God had these very corruptions and this corrupt Church particularly in view.

Scoffers liken the imaginary fables, myths, and legends that men invent with the stories in the Bible. However, for men who love truth and righteousness, a careful study of the Bible will make it abundantly clear that the testimony there is the true word of God. It is no coincidence that modern science was invented in countries that believed in the Bible.

Like Timothy, not only are we to reject profane and old wives' fables, but we are to exercise ourselves to piety. Remember, piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness. And exercise is an activity intended to develop and train. Therefore, exercising ourselves to piety means engaging in activities that develop and train our commitment and devotion to righteousness. We should do that because Paul said piety is profitable for all things. It is profitable for all things because righteousness is what creates everything that is good and right and just.

Bodily exercise is good for our physical health, but piety is good for everything about us. God has so created the world that doing righteousness will produce things that are good and right and just. Moreover, living righteously as disciples of Christ gives us the hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Thus, piety is profitable for all things, both for the present life and the one that is coming. And Paul reinforced that fact by saying it was faithful and worthy of all acceptance.

Solomon wrote much about the benefits of wisdom and righteousness. Wisdom is knowing how to do right, and righteousness is doing it. Here is what Solomon said about wisdom: **“Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. For the gain of it is better than the gain of silver, and the profit of it than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and none of the things thou can desire are to be compared to her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold upon her. And happy is everyone who retains her”** (Proverbs 3:13-18).

Wisdom tells us how to do things right. And since piety is a commitment and devotion to things right, then piety is profitable for all things, including its promise of the afterlife.

## We have hope in the living God

- **For we both labor and are reproached for this, because we have hoped in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of the faithful** (First Timothy 4:10).

Before those words, Paul gave Timothy many instructions regarding many things about the church. And he said the reason was **“that thou may know how it is necessary to live in a house of God, which is a congregation of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”** And he also said to him, **“Laying these things down to the brothers, thou will be a good helper of Jesus Christ ... .”**

Paul says that they (he and his co-workmen) both labored and were reproached for that. They labored to lay down those good instructions to the brothers so they would be good helpers of Christ. The book of acts describes many of the labors of Peter and Paul and their co-workmen to bring the good news of Christ to men.

Paul also said they were reproached for doing it. They were reproached by the enemies of Christ. The book of Acts also describes many times when they were reproached because of their labors as helpers of Christ.

Paul said that he and his co-workmen labored that way because they had hoped in the living God. They believed in God; they trusted God; and they hoped in God—the true and living God. Our faith in Christ includes belief, trust, and hope in God. We believe in God, we trust in what he does for us, and we have hope in the great promises he has given us.

Paul said that God is the Savior of all men, especially of the faithful. God will not save all men, but he gives all men the opportunity to be saved. God saves every man who believes and obeys his Son Jesus Christ. God will also save those who have never had the opportunity to hear Christ if he judges them worthy. However, every man who hears Christ and refuses him will be condemned. God is the Savior of all men who prove themselves worthy of his salvation.

Jesus made that clear in his teachings. Here is one example: **“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).

## Various instructions

- **These things command and teach. Let no man disparage thy youth, but become an example of the faithful, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity** (First Timothy 4:11-12).

Paul told Timothy to both command and teach what he had been instructing him in this letter. The letter includes things about many aspects of the church, such as the nature of our faith, the officers and members of congregations, and dealing with error.

He also encouraged Timothy not to allow any man to disparage his youth. Youth is commonly associated with ignorance, while age is associated with wisdom. And that is normally correct. However, there are many exceptions. I have seen both wise children and foolish old men. Therefore, no man should be judged only on the basis of his age. A man's age is only one aspect of him. And the knowledge and good character of Timothy outweighed the limits of his younger age to be a helper of Christ by commanding and teaching what Paul instructed him.

Timothy was to prove his worthiness to command and teach by becoming an example of the faithful. As Jesus said, we know a tree by its fruits. And the fruits of Timothy's work as a helper of Christ would reveal what kind of man he was. Moreover, he would be teaching by example how the faithful should live.

Paul listed six ways that Timothy could become an example of the faithful. And we too can become an example of the faithful through those six ways. He are the six he listed:

- in word
- in conduct
- in love
- in spirit
- in faith
- in purity

Becoming an example in word means having knowledge of the word of God. And that requires us to study often so that we can learn his word. Becoming an example in conduct refers, of course, to how we behave. As we gain more knowledge of the word of God, that will guide us to have good conduct so that others can see how we ought to behave.

Becoming an example in love refers to our having the kind of love that God wants of us. No man can see the love within our hearts, but they can see the consequences of our love in how we express it. We must show our love to be good examples, because Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5).

The spirit of a man is his life. And the quality of a man's spirit is manifested in the kind of attitude he has and how he conducts his life. We are naturally attracted to a man who has a good spirit because he radiates energy that is always helpful. Therefore, we can become an example in spirit by developing the quality of our spirit, and letting it be manifested in our attitude and our behavior.

We become an example in faith in many ways. We show our faith when we patiently endure suffering. We show our faith when we express our thanks to God for our blessings. We show our faith when we strive to promote the good news of Christ. We become an example in faith every time people see how we express our faith.

And we become an example in purity by keeping ourselves pure and holy, by keeping ourselves from sin and wickedness. As the world has become more sinful it is increasingly difficult to keep ourselves in purity. Nevertheless, as we do keep ourselves in purity we become even more prominent examples of purity because of the growing uncleanness of the world. Just consider how the moral cleanliness of our appearance, conduct, and speech contrasts with the moral filthiness of the world.

## Read, exhort, teach

- **Until I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching** (First Timothy 4:13).

Paul was an apostle, and Timothy was his helper. Paul was an authority of the word, and Timothy helped him proclaim it. Therefore, while Paul was absent it was Timothy's duty to give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. He was to do those things for the benefit of the church.

Giving attention to reading refers both to his own study of the word, and to his public reading of it before the other disciples. Remember, in those times most people were illiterate and books were rare and costly. Therefore, careful attention to reading would keep the word familiar to the people as well as increase their knowledge.

Exhortation refers to both advising and warning people. It is a way to encourage them to live right. Exhortation that is skillfully done before a receptive audience can be a powerful force. It can arouse them to action like nothing else can. However, it can arouse them to evil as well as to good. Therefore, we must be careful about how we exhort people. Our exhortations must always be for righteousness.

Exhortation arouses people, but teaching guides them. Therefore, we must also give attention to teaching the words of the good news of Christ. Indeed, we should give more attention to teaching than to exhortation because for all of us there is much to learn about how to live right and avoid the wrong.

## Do not neglect your gift

- **Do not neglect the gift in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership** (First Timothy 4:14).

The gift that Timothy obtained with the laying on of the hands of the eldership was probably given him by some kind of special training. The laying on of the hands of the eldership was perhaps a form of official recognition that he would be given that training. And Paul said it was given him because it was prophesied that he should have it. What the gift was and who made the prophecy is not told. The prophecy could have been from Paul, or one of the elders, or someone else.

We know that gift was in him by some kind of training because only the apostles could give gifts of the Holy Spirit that required no training. The following story from the book of Acts gives an example of that: **“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.**

**“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 are 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 8:14-24).

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul tells how Timothy did receive some kind of gift of the Holy Spirit from him, because he said, **“Because of which reason I remind thee to rekindle the gift of God that is in thee through the laying on of my hands”** (Second Timothy 1:6). However, what that gift was is not told either.

The lesson in both passages about those gifts is that Timothy should not neglect them. God gives us all some kind of gift of talent so that we can be fruitful in some kind of way. God is the source of every good gift and endowment, as James said: **“Every good gift and every perfect endowment is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning”** (James 1:17).

And Peter encouraged us to use whatever gifts we have to be good stewards of God: **“As each has received a gift, serving it for yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speaks, as oracles of God. If any man serves, as of ability as God supplies. So that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly”** (First Peter 4:10-11).

## Thinking and existing

- **Think on these things—exist within these things—so that thy progress may be visible among all** (First Timothy 4:15).

Paul gave many good commandments about many things, and he told Timothy to think on them. And remember, what he said to Timothy applies to all of us. Thinking on those things means to meditate about them and keep them in our thoughts. We should think on the good commandments of the word of God so we can find ways to apply them and use them to guide our lives.

Furthermore, Paul said we should not only think on those things, but we should exist within them. That means how we live our lives should always be within them. We should do nothing outside of those things. For they define the restricted way that Jesus said leads to life: **“How narrow is the gate, and restricted the way, that leads to life, and few are those who find it”** (Matthew 7:14).

And by thinking on those things and existing within them, then we will progress in our righteousness. In fact that way results in the most productive way of living, and that will be visible among all. For remember what Solomon said about nations: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). Nevertheless remember, there is no escaping from the tribulations and vanity of this life, which is one reason our hope should always be in heaven with God and Christ in the next life.

## Hold firm and continue

- **Hold firm to thyself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this thou will save both thyself and those who hear thee** (First Timothy 4:16).

Paul also said to hold firm to ourselves and to the doctrine. Holding firm to ourselves means living a disciplined life. It means keeping the lusts of our flesh subdued. It means never doing things rashly or on impulse. It means having self-control at all times. A loss of self-control is the greatest of the evils of drunkenness. And that has caused countless misery and suffering both to the guilty and to their innocent victims.

Holding firm to the doctrine means being ever faithful to the teachings of Christ. In order to be faithful to Christ and his good news we must hold firm to the genuine doctrine that is taught in the Holy Bible. But alas most believers have forsaken much of the doctrine of Christ. They have either dismissed his commandments as not important, or they have hearkened to men who have misinterpreted and perverted what is said in the Holy Scriptures.

But for those of us who remain faithful to them, continuing to hold firm to ourselves and to the doctrine, Paul said that we would save both ourselves and those who hear us. That is just one more passage that exposes the false doctrine of salvation by faith only. Our salvation is contingent upon holding firm to ourselves and to the doctrine.

Moreover, by so doing we will also save those who hear us. That does not mean those who merely hear our voice or read what we say. It means those who hearken to what we say. It means that those who both hear and accept the doctrine of Christ that we proclaim will be saved. As with us all, they will be saved by holding firm to themselves and to the doctrine.

## Elder and younger men and women

- **Do not rebuke an elder man, but entreat him as a father, younger men as brothers, elder women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity** (First Timothy 5:1-2).

One of the ten commandments says for us to honor our father and our mother. Another commandment of the law of Moses says, **“Thou shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and thou shall fear thy God. I am Jehovah”** (Leviticus 19:32).

Age deserves special treatment because age is earned by spending years working productively and enduring the trials and tribulations of this life. Solomon even said that old age was a crown of glory: **“The hoary head is a crown of glory. It shall be found in the way of righteousness”** (Proverbs 16:31). Those who live dissipated lives rarely live long. Therefore, when an elderly man may need to be criticized, he should not be rebuked, but reasoned with as a father. Rebukes are for younger men who need a stronger message.

Paul also said we should treat younger men as brothers. We are all brothers in Christ, as Jesus said when he was speaking to his disciples about the scholars and Pharisees: **“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”** (Matthew 23:6-8).

Jesus was using the term brother in the sense of us all being close spiritual kinsmen, because we are all children of God. Nevertheless, how we treat each other depends upon many things, including our age and our gender. Therefore, as Paul said, we should treat the elder men like fathers and the younger men as brothers.

We should also treat the elder women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters. And Paul added that they should be treated in all purity. Younger women are always a temptation that can arouse the fleshly lusts of men. It is the nature of our bodies. Therefore, we must always be on guard against that impurity and treat it like the wretched evil that it is.

## Widows and their grown children

- **Support widows, the real widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to be devoted to their own house, and to give back recompense to their parents, for this is acceptable in the sight of God** (First Timothy 5:3-4).

In this age of socialism and the welfare state it is hard to appreciate how helpless a woman was in the past without the support of a father or a husband. That was especially true of older widows, most of whom had not only lost their husbands but had lost their fathers as well. Therefore, it was very important for the grown children or grandchildren of widows to care for them.

Although the times are different now it is still important for us to insure the support of our widows. And as Paul said, that should be the duty of the (adult) children and grandchildren. Just as our mothers took care of us for the many years while we were weak and helpless as children, so also we should take care of them when they become weak and helpless in their older age. It is proper recompense to them, and acceptable in the sight of God.

## Real widows

- **But the real widow, and made alone, has hoped in God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day** (First Timothy 5:5).

According to Paul a real widow is a woman who has no relatives to help care for her. She is “made alone” having lost her father and her husband and whatever other relatives she had. I think Paul was also including widows who had been completely abandoned by her relatives because they were converted to Christ. Hence, they were “made alone” by that sacrifice.

Paul said that such real widows have their hope in God, and they continually appeal to him and pray to him night and day. They put their trust in our heavenly Father. Such widows need to be supported by us. Remember the example of the early church when there was a problem with sharing such aid: **“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”** (Acts 6:1). The problem was solved by selecting seven men to supervise the distributions.

## Self-indulgent widows

- **But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives. And command these things, so that they may be blameless** (First Timothy 5:6-7).

There are some widows who revel in their independence from their husbands. And they indulge themselves in all kinds of foolish pleasures. They are like the prodigal son that Jesus described, who **“squandered his wealth living recklessly”** (Luke 15:13).

Paul said that such a widow was dead while she lived. Paul was speaking of our two lives: the life of our body of flesh and the life of our divine spirit. The Bible speaks of sinners as being spiritually dead even while their bodies were still alive in the world. For example, Jesus said, **“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”** (John 5:24-25).

Unrepentant sinners are dead because they are condemned to suffer the second death in the afterlife. The book of Revelation speaks of that second death, when it says, **“This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14-15). Hell is the lake of fire. And it is a living death because every soul there will still exist. Hence, the eternal spirit of self-indulgent widows is dead in the sense of being condemned to exist in the living death of hell, even though her body of flesh may still be alive.

Paul told Timothy to command those things about widows so that they would be blameless. The families of widows would be blameless if they cared for them properly. The congregation would be blameless if they cared for the real widows. And the widows would be blameless if they lived right and resisted being self-indulgent.

## Not providing for our own

- **But if any man does not provide for his own, and especially those belonging to his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel** (First Timothy 5:8).

Infidels are men who have no faith in God and Christ. They are men who live selfish lives of sin. Nevertheless, they still provide for their own. Even the wicked king Herod provided for his own, with a few exceptions. Therefore, any man who does not provide for his own, and especially those belonging to his household, is worse than an infidel.

Paul said that such a man has denied the faith. That means a man who does not provide for his own has forsaken all that we believe. For our faith is in God and his righteousness, which includes loving our neighbor as ourselves. And a man who does not love his own enough to provide for them, how can he love his neighbor?

Jesus even provided for his own when he was suffering on the cross. For the record says, **“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).

## Enrolling widows

- **Let no widow be enrolled under sixty years old, having become the wife of one man, being testified in good works: if she has reared children, if she has been hospitable to strangers, if she has washed the feet of the sanctified, if she has relieved those who are afflicted, if she has followed every good work** (First Timothy 5:9-10).

Paul now speaks of the enrollment of widows. The purpose of which was to provide for them because of their need. However, because of the special qualifications he gives, that enrollment was for a special kind of widow. They were to be older women of the highest reputation who did not remarry.

Paul mentioned two specific qualifications for them: (1) that they not be younger than sixty years old, and (2) that they had become the wife of one man. He also mentioned one general qualification: that they were testified in good works.

Widows that were younger than sixty years old were better able to find ways to provide for themselves with gainful employment of some kind. Caring for other children, doing housework, working in markets and shops are examples of what they could do. Widows sixty years and older were less able because of the declining health and energy that accompanies old age.

Regarding the matter of becoming the wife of one man, a widow by definition is a woman whose husband was deceased. And in order to be enrolled for assistance from the church Paul said the woman could only have been married to one man. Widows were certainly allowed to remarry. Indeed, farther in this letter Paul said that the younger widows should remarry.

However, a second marriage would have disqualified a woman from being enrolled as a widow even if she became a widow again with the death of her second husband. That qualification would limit the enrollment to only those widows who would not remarry. Indeed, Paul indicated farther in this book that part of become enrolled as a widow involved pledging never to remarry. Of course, not many women that were sixty years or older would consider remarriage anyway. But the widows who did remarry were considered not qualified for that special enrollment.

Paul also said that for a woman to be enrolled as a widow she must be testified in good works. And he listed four examples of those good works, followed by a general statement of having followed every good work. He said she could be enrolled if she has

reared children  
 been hospitable to strangers  
 washed the feet of the sanctified

relieved those who are afflicted  
followed every good work

God's primary role for womankind is to bear and rear children. However, for various reasons some women are not able to bear children. However, virtually every woman is able to rear them. Hence, even if a woman could not have children of her own, she could still serve to help other women rear their children.

Strangers refer to travelers, including those from foreign countries. Strangers are more vulnerable to harm and exploitation. That was especially true in those times. Therefore, it was important to be hospitable to them. Remember, Paul earlier said that one of the qualifications of an overseer was to love strangers.

Washing the feet of the sanctified symbolized providing helpful services to them when it was needed; washing their feet should not be taken literally. During those times most of the roads were dusty and the people wore sandals. Hence, there was the need to wash the feet after walking very far. However, such a need rarely occurs these days.

Relieving those who are afflicted generally refers to those with ill health. There are many ways that women can provide relief to the afflicted without themselves being a nurse or a physician. Simply being with them and speaking words of encouragement is one way.

Notice how those four specific good works are all about helping other people: children, strangers, the sanctified, and the afflicted. There are many things that women are not well equipped to do, but they can almost always help other people in various ways.

The last one in that list of five good works was a general statement about having followed every good work. That simply means the widow needed to be a woman who had done a variety of good works whenever there was a need and she was able.

I need to say that the enrollment of widows was not membership in any kind of office. It did not involve receiving any kind of authority or being given a special service. It was simply for the purpose of identifying those widows who were to receive regular assistance from the church.

I do not know how many congregations enroll their widows that way now. There may be some who do, but I personally have not heard of any. Perhaps the reason is because such "real widows" are rare during these more prosperous times and they have no need for such support. That is especially true in countries with social welfare services.

### Do not enroll younger widows

- **But refuse younger widows, for when they are sexually aroused, they desire of the Christ to marry, which has condemnation because they have disregarded the original pledge.**
- **And also at the same time they learn to be idle, roving the houses, and not only idle, but also babbling and meddlesome, speaking things that they ought not** (First Timothy 5:11-13).

Our sexual appetite is as normal and needed as our appetite for food. However, with older age our sexual appetite diminishes. Therefore, younger widows are more liable to be sexu-

ally aroused. That leads to the desire to remarry. Marriage is certainly honorable. However, women who were enrolled as widows for the assistance give a pledge not to remarry. That means the younger widows who were enrolled would be disregarding their pledge if they desired to remarry. Hence, Paul commanded the younger widows be refused for that enrollment.

What Paul meant by the younger widows desiring of the Christ to marry was probably that they wanted the blessing of Christ on their marriage. They wanted to marry in the body of Christ, and they wanted the church to honor their marriage. And that was certainly an honorable desire. What was condemned was the violation of their pledge not to remarry.

Paul also said the younger widows were more liable to engage in foolish behaviors. Namely, learning to be idle and roving the houses, and learning to be babbling and meddlesome, speaking things that they ought not. There would be the risk of that happening if they were enrolled and were receiving assistance from the church. That would give them the free time to be idle, which they could use to rove the houses and be babbling and meddlesome, speaking things that they ought not.

Although certainly not all of them would be guilty of such things, nevertheless, the temptation to do them would cause too many, perhaps even the majority, to sin that way. For such behaviors can become infectious and spread widely. For example, I have seen how often gossip tends to spread that way even in the churches.

None of us should be idle and roving houses, babbling and meddlesome, speaking things that we ought not. We wear clothes so that people cannot see everything about how we look. We do it because nakedness is unhealthy and arouses evils. Likewise, there are many personal things that we ought not speak about. Doing so accomplishes nothing useful, but is unhealthy and arouses evils.

Here are some of the things Solomon said about the wisdom of not speaking too much:

**Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely** (Proverbs 10:19).

**He who guards his mouth keeps his life. He who opens wide his lips shall have destruction** (Proverbs 13:3).

**He who spares his words has knowledge, and he who is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is considered wise. When he shuts his lips, he is prudent** (Proverbs 17:27-28).

## Marriage and the younger women

- **I desire therefore the younger women to marry, to bear children, to manage house, to give not one occasion to him who opposes on account of slander. For some have already turned aside after Satan** (First Timothy 5:14-15).

Remember, Paul's desire, which is expressed in that passage, was not personal; he was speaking of God's desire. Remember also, his desire for the younger women to marry was not a universal command for every woman. It was a general command for most women because that is their God-given role in life. Eve was created to be a helpmate for Adam and to bear and rear children. And that is the general role for all women.

By marrying, the younger women would be avoiding many temptations, which give occasions to our enemy the devil to slander us. Slander is one of his most commonly used and effective weapons against us. For slander is rarely investigated properly, exposed, and punished. Hence, when occasions arise to employ slander they are often successful in staining our reputations, which undermines our efforts to promote Christ and his good news. That was one reason why Paul said, **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** (First Thessalonians 5:22).

Turning aside after Satan means turning away from Christ and his kingdom. Satan is the great adversary of God. And people go after him because he is the ruler of this world. And that means those who go after him are joining the sinful ways of the world. It is much easier to obtain the pleasures, the wealth, and the glories of the world when you follow after Satan.

However, following after Satan is like the foolish act of Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage (see Genesis 25:31-33). The book of Hebrews warns against being a **“profane man like Esau, who, in place of one meal sold his birthright. For ye also know that wanting afterward to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though having sought it with tears”** (Hebrews 12:16-17).

And remember what Jesus said were the consequences of forsaking God: **“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”** (Matthew 13:40-42).

In the above passage Paul said, **“I desire therefore the younger women to marry ... .”** However, he said to the Corinthians, **“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, it is good for them if they remain even as I [meaning unmarried]”** (First Corinthians 7:8).

That is no contradiction, because Paul explained what he meant a little farther in that book: **“Now concerning the virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give an opinion, as having obtained mercy from the Lord to be trustworthy. I suppose therefore this to be good because of the present distress, that it is good for a man to be this way: Are thou bound to a wife? Do not seek separation. Are thou free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But also if thou didst marry thou have not sinned, and if the virgin married she has not sinned. Yet such kind will have stress in the flesh, but I spare you”** (First Corinthians 7:25-28).

## Caring for widows

- **If any believing man or believing woman has widows, let them relieve them, and let not the congregation be burdened, so that it may relieve the real widows** (First Timothy 5:16).

Paul is saying here that it is our personal duty as children of God to provide for our own widows. That means our kinfolk, those who are blood relatives of us. Otherwise the congregation would have that burden, which would make it more difficult for them to provide for the real widows.

Our duty is to provide for our own widows. And the duty of the congregation is to provide for the real widows who are part of the body of Christ. It is not our duty nor is it the duty of a congregation to provide for the widows of unbelievers. We are not obligated to support the world. Of course, we are not forbidden to give any help to unbelievers either. We should be toward the (desperately) needy of them as was the good Samaritan in the story Jesus told (see Luke 10: 30-37).

## Elders who rule well

- **Let the elders who rule well be regarded worthy of double compensation, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. For the scripture says, Thou shall not muzzle an ox that is threshing, and, The workman is worthy of his wage** (First Timothy 5:17-18).

The compensation that Paul is here referring to is payment for the services the elders (overseers) render. Paul makes that clear when he quotes the passage from the law of Moses which says, **“Thou shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the grain”** (Deuteronomy 25:4).

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul explained how that law was primarily for men, and not for oxen: **“For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shall not muzzle an ox threshing grain. Is God concerned about oxen, or does he speak altogether for our sake? For our sake, for it was written, He who plows ought to plow with hope, and he who threshes with his hope, with hope to share”** (First Corinthians 9:9-10).

The second scripture that Paul mentioned also appears to be from the law of Moses. It says: **“Thou shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brothers, or of thy sojourners that are in thy land within thy gates. Thou shall give him his hire in his day, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it, lest he cry against thee to Jehovah, and it be sin to thee”** (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).

However, in this case Paul paraphrased part of the commandment to say, **“The workman is worthy of his wage.”** Paul could quote that way because his writings were divinely inspired. However, it would be wrong for any of us to quote that way because we are not. Our duty is to either quote exactly or state clearly that we are paraphrasing or interpreting.

Most overseers and helpers (the elders and the deacons) now provide part-time service without financial compensation. The elders usually hire a preacher or minister to do most of the labor in the word and in teaching. Nevertheless, Paul justified giving the ruling elders compensation or a wage. And he said those who ruled well should be regarded worthy of double compensation, especially those who labored in the word and in teaching.

## Accusations against an elder

- **Accept no accusation against an elder, except at two or three witnesses. Those who sin, rebuke in the sight of all, so that the others may also have fear** (First Timothy 5:19-20).

The requirement for two or three witnesses to testify about sin was given in the law of Moses. It says, **“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).

Although a man might escape punishment for his sin when only one witness could be found, nevertheless, requiring two or three witnesses provided much more assurance that the accused was guilty. That helped prevent false accusations. That was especially true among the sons of Israel, because the law of Moses also said, **“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”** (Deuteronomy 19:16-20).

Apparently one man could accuse another of guilt, but nothing could be done against the accused unless one or two other witnesses could be found. If other witnesses were found, then the accused would suffer punishment. However, if the inquiry revealed that the accuser was a false one, then he would suffer the punishment instead. That risk on the part of a false accuser would greatly discourage making false accusations.

Regarding punishment, the law of Moses gave the people of Israel the right to punish severely, including the use of capital punishment. However, the church can only withdraw fellowship or rebuke publicly (within the church).

In the above passage of First Timothy, Paul said about elders, **“Those who sin, rebuke in the sight of all ... .”** Yet he said earlier, **“Do not rebuke an elder man, but entreat him as a father ...”** (First Timothy 5:1). Paul is not contradicting himself. His command about not rebuking an elder man was not intended to be absolute. Rebuking an elder who sins was an exception to that earlier stated rule.

We as children of God are not committed to rigid laws with him. We are allowed to deviate as circumstances require, as long as what we do is always good and right and just. Remember the example Jesus gave about David when the Pharisees accused his disciples of violating the sabbath (see Matthew 12).

Paul also said the guilty elder was to be rebuked in the sight of all. That would help arouse fear to discourage others from sinning. In this cowardly generation of believers, guilt and its punishment is almost always concealed. Guilty elders are allowed to quietly resign without revealing the real reason.

### Do nothing from partiality

- **I solemnly testify before God, and Lord Jesus Christ, and the chosen agents, that thou keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing from partiality** (First Timothy 5:21).

Regarding partiality, remember this passage from Revelation that tells what happened after Jesus succeeded in living a sinless life upon the earth in perfect obedience to God: **“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).

One of the reasons Satan could continually accuse us before God is because none of us is without sin, and God is completely impartial, without prejudice. Hence, if God forgave our sins he would need to forgive the sins of Satan and his followers. Jesus made our forgiveness possible by qualifying to become our redeemer. That freed God to condemn the devil and his disciples without being partial to us. Our forgiveness was part of God’s reward to Christ for his suffering and his labors in the world.

God is always completely just and without partiality, and as his children we too must be completely just and without partiality. Paul’s charge to Timothy to be without prejudice and do nothing from partiality is for all of us. The world is filled with injustice, prejudice, and partiality of many different kinds. But all those things are wrong. We should seek justice in all things.

In my lifetime I have seen how prejudice and partiality have resulted in much injustice and evil. And the name of God has been blasphemed and the cause of Christ has suffered because many believers have been prejudiced and partial. Paul told how the hypocrisy of the Jews brought dishonor to God: **“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). And those who claim to believe in Christ who are prejudiced and partial also bring dishonor to him.

Paul mentioned the chosen agents. This is the only place in the Bible that refers to them. However, there are many places where we the disciples of Christ are referred to as the chosen of God. Paul spoke of that, when he said, **“Put on therefore, as chosen men of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering ...”** (Colossians 3:12).

Peter also mentioned it when he 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. 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).

And Jesus even mentioned it. For when he was describing the end of the world, he said, **“And he [the son of man] 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 24:31).

We have been chosen to become sons of God for eternity. And we were not chosen from partiality. We were chosen because we believed in Jesus Christ, repented of our sins, and were immersed in water for the remission of them. That opportunity to be chosen a child

of God is available to all men, all who have made their spirits worthy of that selection. For God is impartial.

Who the chosen agents are, why they were chosen, and for what purpose is not told. Nevertheless, the mere mention of chosen agents indicates that the qualities of the spirits of the agents in heaven vary just as the quality of our spirits vary. And the fact that God is impartial indicates those agents made their spirits worthy of selection, just as we must make our spirits worthy. We make our spirits worthy by being humble and lowly, by loving truth and righteousness, and having open hearts to learn and obey.

Paul solemnly testified before God, and Lord Jesus Christ, and the chosen agents, that Timothy (and we) keep the commandments and instructions that Paul gave without prejudice, doing nothing from partiality. He solemnly testified that way to emphasize the importance of doing those things without prejudice and partiality.

### More instructions

- **Lay hands hastily on no man, nor contribute to other sins. Keep thyself pure** (First Timothy 5:22).

Since Timothy was not an apostle, he could not give anyone special gifts of the Holy Spirit by laying his hands upon them. What Paul meant here by the laying on of hands was to make an official and public recognition of some man for some purpose. For example, Paul told how Titus was to appoint elders in every city: **“I left thee behind in Crete on account of this: That thou should set in order the things lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded thee ...”** (Titus 1:5). The process of appointing elders probably involved the public laying on of his hands as a kind of ceremony indicating they were appointed, although it is not commanded.

Paul warned Timothy not to lay his hands upon any man hastily. Making an official appointment of anyone should not be done hastily. Careful investigations and testing are important prerequisites for any position. And the more important the position the more carefully they should be done.

Paul also warned against contributing to other sins. Every other version I know about translates that passage to say “other men’s sin,” or “other people’s sins,” or some variation of that. However, the Greek word for “other” is feminine, and no noun such as “men” or “other” is given. Their translations are completely unwarranted.

Laying hands hastily on a man was contributing to sin. And Paul was simply warning Timothy not to contribute to other sins—of any kind. He was to keep himself pure. It is a temptation to weaken and contribute to some sin when it would please the multitude and make them appreciate you better. Such things can be more tempting to young men like Timothy. Paul was warning against that, for him and for us all. We are to keep ourselves pure regardless of the will of the people.

### Use a little wine for medicinal purposes

- **No longer drink water, but use a little wine because of thy stomach and thy frequent weaknesses** (First Timothy 5:23).

Paul was certainly not commanding Timothy against drinking water. Otherwise he would not have said for him to use a *little* wine. Timothy apparently had some kind of stomach disorder. Paul also mentioned his frequent weaknesses. Whether a stomach disorder caused his frequent weaknesses is not told. In fact, nothing more is ever said about Timothy's problem with his health.

The lesson in that passage is simply that a little wine can sometimes be used to help with stomach disorders and frequent weaknesses. Too much wine is never healthy, because it contains alcohol. And alcohol is intoxicating when taken in sufficient quantity, which intoxication we call drunkenness. The Bible contains many warnings against drunkenness, including this one by Paul: **“And do not become intoxicated with wine, during which is debauchery ...”** (Ephesians 5:18).

Nevertheless, the book of Proverbs does speak about using strong drink for medicinal purposes. **“Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish, and wine to the bitter in soul. Let him drink, and forget his need, and remember his misery no more”** (Proverbs 31:6-7). That no doubt refers to people in great pain, and tells to use strong drink to anesthetize.

Paul did not say what there was about a little wine that would help Timothy with his stomach and his frequent weaknesses. I did a brief search on the internet and found that any health benefits of wine are controversial. Those who claimed it was helpful spoke of its value on the cardiovascular system and in the reduction of the probability of cancer.

None that I found mentioned the stomach or frequent weaknesses. Since Paul did not say his recommendation to Timothy about water and wine was for all of us, then Timothy must have had some kind of rare disorder where such things would have helped.

## The evidence of works

- **The sins of some men are evident, leading to judgment, but also for some they follow after. Likewise also good works are evident, and those faring otherwise cannot be hid** (First Timothy 5:24-25).

There is considerable variation in how well the sins of individual men are known. As Paul said, the sins of some men are evident. And that causes them to be judged and punished. However, there are many examples of the sins of men that were not exposed until after they died. Such men may escape being judged and punished in this life, but they will not escape in the afterlife.

There is also considerable variation in how well the good works of individual men are known. For some men their good works are clearly seen, while those of other men are not. Nevertheless, unlike sins, Paul said that good works cannot be hid. Men try to hid their sins, but not their good works. But even when men try to hid their good works, such as acts of charity, they cannot remain hid.

Actually, nothing can remain hid, because Jesus said, **“... there is nothing covered, that will not be revealed, and hid, that will not be known”** (Matthew 10:26). All things will be revealed in the great day of judgment.

## Bondmen toward their masters

- **Let bondmen, as many as are under a yoke, regard their own masters worthy of all respect, so that the name of God and the doctrine may not be blasphemed** (First Timothy 6:1).

Being under a yoke means being obligated in some way. Bondmen are under a yoke because they are obligated to serve their masters. Soldiers are under a yoke because they are obligated to serve their country. Wives are under a yoke because they are obligated to serve their husbands as to the Lord (see Ephesians 5:22).

Paul said that whoever was under a yoke should regard those who are over them worthy of all respect. Bondmen must regard their own masters as worthy of all respect. Soldiers must regard their own officers as worthy of all respect. Wives must regard their own husbands as worthy of all respect.

Otherwise the name of God and the doctrine of Christ would be blasphemed. They would be blasphemed because we are representatives of Christ and his good news of our salvation. For how we act reflects upon Christ and his good news of our salvation. The enemies of God love to find occasions when we can be criticized so that they can condemn Christ and his good news.

## Believing masters

- **And those who have believing masters, let them not disparage them because they are brothers, instead let them serve more because they are believers and beloved—those who are recipients of the benefit. Teach and exhort these things** (First Timothy 6:2).

The special relationship we have as spiritual brothers in Christ can sometimes tempt those who are subservient to any of them in some other capacity to diminish their esteem and authority. That is why the military service discourages officers and enlisted men from fraternizing with each other. That is why it is wise for teachers and students to preserve the formality of their relationship. That is why children should always honor their fathers and their mothers. Egalitarianism first leads to anarchy then to tyranny. Has there ever been a communist country that began from revolution but did not end in dictatorship?

As disciples of Christ we should serve our brothers to whom we may be obligated with even more service. We should serve them more because they are believers and beloved. As children of God we are to love each other. And serving our masters more is a way to show it. It makes them the recipients of the benefit of our greater service.

Paul commanded Timothy to teach and exhort those things. They are important for us all both to know and to obey.

## Men who teach something different

- **If any man teaches something different, and does not associate with wholesome words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine**

**according to piety, he is puffed up, understanding nothing, but doting about disputes and word controversies, from which develop envy, strife, revilings, evil surmisings, constant frictions of men corrupted in mind, and destitute of the truth, supposing piety to be a means of gain. Withdraw from such** (First Timothy 6:3-5).

What Paul meant by teaching something different was whatever contradicted what he was teaching. What Paul taught was the word of God. They were wholesome words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he received directly from him, as he said to the brothers at Galatia: **“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).

Paul said he taught the doctrine according to piety. A doctrine consists of the principles of something. Therefore, since piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness, then the doctrine according to piety consists of the principles of righteousness. And the wholesome words that Jesus gave us are filled with principles of righteousness.

Paul gave a lengthy description of men who taught something different and did not associate with wholesome words and to the doctrine according to piety. He said that such a man was

puffed up  
 understanding nothing  
 doting about disputes and word controversies  
 corrupted in mind  
 destitute of the truth  
 supposing piety to be a means of gain

Being puffed up means being proud and arrogant. It means the man has an exaggerated and inflated opinion of himself. He considers himself to be much better and of greater worth than he really is. It might be said that he is a dwarf who looks at himself in a mirror and sees a giant.

Such a man understands nothing. Otherwise he would not be puffed up, nor would he teach anything different. There are and have been many men who have been like that. And those who have persuaded many to follow them have created much evil in the world. They are and have been blind leaders of the blind, as Jesus warned (see Matthew 15:14).

Such men dote about disputes and word controversies. Word controversies refer to arguments about words. Often arguments are caused by simple differences in understanding the meaning of words. One of the most important things about disagreements is to be sure everyone understands the meaning of the words used.

Men who dote about disputes and word controversies love to argue and contradict. Their goal is not to know the truth, but to win against someone else. Paul said they were men who suppose piety to be a means of gain. He said the result only creates evils, examples of which he listed. He said those disputes and word controversies produce

envy  
 strife  
 revilings

evil surmisings

constant frictions of men corrupted in mind, and destitute of the truth

The losers of such disputes then envy and resent the winners. The disputes themselves create strife, which arouses emotions that cause revilings. The combatants also surmise evil things about each other because of their hostile feelings. Such disputes produce constant frictions of men corrupted in mind, and destitute of the truth, because their goal is not truth but defeating someone else.

Men who are corrupted in mind, and destitute of the truth suppose piety to be a means of gain. Therefore, they portray themselves as being pious. For them is it a strategy to increase their power, glory, and wealth. The Pharisees were such kind of men. For Jesus said 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. 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 he said about the scholars, **“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 20:46-47).

Paul warned Timothy to withdraw from such men. And we too should have nothing to do with them. If they provoke you to argue, withdraw from them. Only when men show they are genuinely seeking truth should we take time to reason with them. Otherwise you will only be wasting your time, and will be risking hostile behavior against you. For example, Solomon said, **“Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee. Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee”** (Proverbs 9:8).

## Piety and contentment

- **But piety with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world. It is clear that neither can we carry anything out, but having food and covering we will be content with these** (First Timothy 6:6-8).

The great gain Paul mentioned is the spiritual gain we receive from piety. Having the promises of God, piety gives us the contentment that only our hope in him can give. Those who put their hope in the things of this life are always going to feel insecure because nothing here can be fully trusted. Only God and his promises can be fully trusted. And that is truly great gain.

The rulers of ancient Egypt wasted vast amounts of time and energy by many men building the great pyramids and storing their treasures in them for an afterlife. Those rulers are long dead, and their great pyramids and treasures proved to be useless to them. Throughout history men have sought in vain how to take their treasures with them after they die.

Jesus told us the only way that can be done, when he said, **“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). And those treasures are not earthly but heavenly.

Therefore, we should be content with having food and covering, the covering of our clothing and the shelter over our heads. Certainly we can rejoice if God blesses us with more things, and enjoy them when used righteously. For Solomon said, **“Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God”** (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

We should rejoice about the resources God gives us to aid our productivity. But we should be content with the basic things, and seek to learn the secret Paul spoke about, when he said, **“I know both how to be abased and how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to be lacking. I can do all things in the Christ who strengthens me”** (Philippians 4:12-13).

## Wanting to be rich

- **But those who want to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, which sink men in destruction and ruin** (First Timothy 6:9).

There is no sin in being rich, but there are many warnings in the Bible against striving to be rich besides the one Paul gave here. For example, 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).

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).

Becoming rich is not easily achieved. It takes great ambition and striving. Moreover, it requires a man to make many compromises and sacrifices in his values. Paul said it causes a man to fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts. The desire for riches often causes a man to do things that are not right, even though they may be legal. It often causes a man to hurt many other people in his struggle to become rich.

Those things sink him into spiritual destruction and ruin, making it easier for a camel to pass through the hole of a needle than for him to enter into the kingdom of God. For men who are ambitious to become rich and to remain rich must sacrifice the very values necessary to enter the kingdom of God. Remember what Jesus said about our lives: **“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it”** (Matthew 10:39). Men who love riches are not willing to make that sacrifice.

## The love of money

- **For the love of money is a root of all the evils, of which some aspiring have wandered from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows** (First Timothy 6:9-10).

Paul did not say that money was a root of all the evils. Neither did he say that the love of money was the root of all the evils. He said it was a root of all the evils, because evil has many roots. Money is loved because most things can be obtained with money, either directly or indirectly. An example of obtaining something indirectly with money would be to gaining the admiration of other people, because most people admire the rich.

Another example is marriage. For many women would marry a rich man because of his money, although Solomon said that love cannot be bought with any amount of money: **“Many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned”** (Song of Solomon 8:7).

Paul warned against the love of money because it is a root of all the evils. Since many people love money, because most things can be obtained with money, that causes them to do things for money that are not right. I have personally seen how people can be transformed when issues of money arise. And their transformation is not for the better. It is shocking to see when it happens. Issues of money can be one of the most revealing tests of a man’s character.

Paul told how some disciples had even wandered from the faith because of their love of money. And in so doing they had pierced themselves through with many sorrows. They pierced themselves through with many sorrows because the love of money blinds people to the evil consequences of their grasping for it. They hurt themselves in many ways and they hurt those they love. And worst of all they destroy their faith and their hope of the afterlife.

## Flee the evil, pursue the good

- **But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, piety, faith, love, patience, meekness** (First Timothy 6:11).

Paul called Timothy a man of God, and he commanded him to flee those things, which must refer to the love of money and wanting to be rich, because he had just been speaking of those things. Notice how Paul did not say to reject or shun or ignore such things. He said to flee from them, which is a much stronger word. That suggests the temptation to love money and desire to be rich was a greater danger to a man’s soul than many other things.

Instead, Paul told Timothy to pursue these good things: righteousness, piety, faith, love, patience, meekness. Righteousness is doing things that are good, right, and just. Piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness. Faith is our belief and trust in God and his Son Jesus Christ. Love involves doing good to others. Love is both a desire to do good and a manifestation of that desire by doing good. Patience is a willingness to endure discomfort. Meekness is having a gentle and humble spirit.

Those are simply examples of the kinds of virtues that every man of God should have. The Bible is filled with descriptions and examples of men of God and the good things they pursued.

## The good fight

- **Fight the good fight of the faith** (First Timothy 6:12).

In the first part of this letter, Paul spoke about the good warfare: **“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”** (First Timothy 1:18). And in his second letter to Timothy, Paul said he had fought the good fight: **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith”** (Second Timothy 4:7).

The good warfare is our war against the enemies of God because they commit sin and wickedness, which are the causes of all sorrow and death. The good fight of the faith is our trust in God and our opposition to his enemies. And all who would be faithful disciples of Christ must war the good warfare and fight the good fight of the faith.

Although the world does not believe it, Jesus said, **“Think not that I came to spread peace on the earth. I came not to spread peace, but a sword”** (Matthew 10:34). The world does not believe it because the devil has deceived them. Jesus loves peace, but peace can only come with the defeat of sin and wickedness. Therefore, until sin and wickedness are completely defeated, we must continue to war the good warfare and fight the good fight of the faith using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (see Ephesians 6:17).

There are many other passages in the New Testament that tell about the good warfare and the good fight of the faith. Here is only one example: **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled”** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

## Take hold of eternal life

- **Take hold of the eternal life for which thou are called, and confessed the good confession in the sight of many witnesses** (First Timothy 6:12).

We have all been called to the eternal life that is through Christ Jesus. But only those who accept that calling by believing and obeying him will be able to take hold of eternal life. As Jesus said, **“For many are called, but few chosen”** (Matthew 22:14). Few are chosen because the many will not believe and obey him.

The good confession that Timothy made in the sight of many witnesses was to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ the Son of God. It is called the good confession because it is true, and it enables us to take hold of eternal life.

Nothing is ever said in the Bible about when Timothy made that confession to become a disciple of Christ. Nor does it say who were those many witnesses. However, those are incidental details that are unimportant for us. What is important is that we too make the good confession before witnesses, either before or after we become a disciple. Only Philip observed the immersion of the Ethiopian eunuch (see Acts 8:36-39), because it was done in the wilderness. However, that eunuch had many opportunities to make the good confession to many others after he returned to his homeland.

## Living until our Lord Jesus appears

- **I command thee in the sight of God, who makes all live, and of Christ Jesus, who testified to Pontius Pilate the good confession, that thou keep the commandment, without spot, blameless, until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will show in his own times, the blessed and only Potentate, the King of those who are kings, and Lord of those who are lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in irreproachable light, whom no man has seen, nor can see, to whom is honor and eternal dominion. Truly** (First Timothy 6:13-16).

Paul commanded Timothy to keep the commandment. He was not speaking about one particular commandment, but all of the commandments. There are other passages that are worded that way. For example, the apostle John spoke of his (Jesus') commandment, but then he told how that commandment included all of his commandments: **“Beloved, if our heart should not condemn us, we have confidence toward God, and whatever we may ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do things pleasing in his sight.**

**“And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love each other, just as he gave command. 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 3:21-24).

Paul also said that Timothy was to keep the commandment without spot, keep it blameless. That means Timothy was to obey all of the commandments of Christ without violating any of them. He was to obey all of them completely. For there is nothing that will destroy our efforts to promote Christ and his good news more than being ourselves guilty of disobedience. We must keep the commandment without spot, blameless.

As disciples of Christ we are to strive diligently not to sin. However, that does not mean if we do commit a sin, in a moment of weakness, that as a disciple of Christ, God will not forgive us. Because the apostle John said, **“My little children, I write these things to you so that ye may not sin. And if any man does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—righteous Jesus Christ”** (First John 2:1).

Paul also commanded Timothy to keep the commandment without spot until the appearance of Christ. And Paul reminded Timothy that Jesus Christ is our Lord. And at the end of the world he will appear in the clouds to gather his chosen. He will show himself to the world in his own times, but he will only gather his chosen. Until then we see him through the eyes of our faith, and wait for him patiently.

Paul commanded those things in the sight of God and of Christ. That seems to have been a way to emphasize the importance of keeping the commandment without spot, blameless. He also mentioned how God is he who makes all live. God is the creator of all things, including life on the earth and eternal life in heaven. Therefore, it is through him that we must seek life.

Paul also told how Christ testified the good confession to Pontius Pilate. Jesus would have been spared crucifixion if he had not made that confession. Here is how John described it: **“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”** (John 18:37). Jesus sacrificed his life to make that good confession to the Roman governor.

In that very rich and beautiful passage from First Timothy, Paul then described the greatness of Christ, saying,

he is the blessed and only Potentate  
 he is the King of those who are kings, and the Lord of those who are lords  
 he alone has immortality  
 he dwells in irreproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see  
 to whom is honor and eternal dominion

Jesus is the blessed of God. He is the blessed because he is the only begotten Son of God who has never been justly condemned for anything because he has always lived in perfect obedience. Therefore it was just for God to make him the only Potentate, the ruler of all things. And being the only Potentate he is the King of all other kings and the Lord of all other lords.

He alone has immortality because he alone has lived a perfect life. His body of flesh perished, but his spirit never has. Our spirits all perish, in the sense of being condemned to the eternal fires of hell when we sin against God. Remember what Paul said about widows: **“But she who is self-indulgent is dead while she lives”** (First Timothy 5:6). Sin causes death, because Paul also said, **“The sting of death is sin”** (First Corinthians 15:56).

We can only live again by being begotten again in the spirit. As Peter said, **“Ye should love each other fervently from a pure heart, begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God that lives and remains into the age”** (First Peter 1:22-23). Jesus never needed to be begotten again because his spirit never perished. He alone has immortality, being always immortal.

Therefore, he dwells in irreproachable light, which is the throne of God in heaven. No man has ever seen that light, nor can we see it. We only know of it from passages such as this one to Timothy. Yet for those who believe and trust God, obeying his Son Jesus Christ, we will one day be able to dwell with Jesus in that irreproachable light. For when Jesus was speaking of the end of the world, he said, **“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”** (Matthew 13:43).

Jesus is sinless, immortal, the only Potentate, to whom is honor and eternal dominion. Honor and eternal dominion is his because he deserves them. He proved his moral and spiritual superiority over all others, except only for God the Father, who was, who is, and who always will be supreme over everything.

## Commands for the rich

- **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).

Notice how Paul spoke of the rich in the present age. He was referring to being rich in this world. For we who believe and obey our Lord Jesus Christ will share the riches and the glory of heaven with him.

It is a natural temptation of the rich to be arrogant, because they can get so many things. The rich have no worries about food and covering, nor do they need to labor for them. And they tend to think they are better and wiser than other people. As Solomon said, **“The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out”** (Proverbs 28:11). Therefore, Paul commanded the rich not to be arrogant.

He also commanded them not to hope in the uncertainty of wealth. Remember what Solomon said about the uncertainty of wealth: **“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).

There is only one certainty, and that is the living God. He is what we must set our hope upon. For we are all going to perish in this short life we live upon the earth. Remember these wise words of Jesus: **“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).

Our hope is in the living God, who supplies us all things abundantly for enjoyment. The Bible clearly teaches that God is the ultimate source of every blessing. And his blessings are for us to both use them to bear fruit for his righteousness, and for us to enjoy. Sinners think all of his blessings are simply for their pleasure and happiness. And they indulge their pleasures whether they are right or wrong. God supplies us all things abundantly for enjoyment in the right ways. And he will judge those who use them wrongfully.

Paul also told Timothy to command the rich of the world to do good and to be rich in good works. The rich are to use their riches to bear good fruits and promote truth and righteousness. Remember Jesus’ story about the rich man who said he was going to use his riches to take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But that very night he died instead. Jesus called him a foolish man, and said about him: **“So is he who stores up for himself, and is not being rich toward God”** (Luke 12:21).

Paul said the rich were also to be generous and willing to share. That way they could store up for themselves a good foundation for that which is coming, which is the afterlife. Paul said that way they could take hold of the eternal life. There is no sin for a man to be rich

unless he does not use his wealth to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share.

Remember also Jesus' story of the rich man who ignored the sufferings of the poor man Lazarus. Part of that story says, **“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”** (Luke 16:22-25).

### Keep the entrustment, avoid foolish talk

- **O Timothy, keep the entrustment, avoiding the profane babblings and objections of the falsely-called knowledge, which some men professing have missed the mark concerning the faith. Grace is with thee. Truly** (First Timothy 6:20-21).

There is much in the world that is falsely-called knowledge. Many things are proclaimed as knowledge when in fact they are merely beliefs, theories, and conjectures. What Paul is referring to here is falsely-called knowledge about God and his will for us because it concerns the faith. Paul warned Timothy to avoid the profane babblings and objections of those things.

Much of what is taught now in the colleges of theology is falsely-called knowledge. And it generates much profane babblings and objections about God, about Christ, about the Bible, and about what the good news of Christ is. I have heard students of those colleges say they had to rebuild their faith after they graduated. I have heard and read much of what those who profess such falsely-called knowledge have said, and they have indeed missed the mark concerning the faith.

Paul told Timothy to keep the entrustment. What he meant was the truth about the word of God and the good news of Christ. As disciples of Christ, we all need to work with God to keep the entrustment, because Satan is constantly trying to destroy it with such things as the profane babblings and objections of the falsely-called knowledge of men, which things we must avoid.

As in all of his letters, Paul ended by reminding them that the grace of God was with them (in this case Timothy). And we too need to remember that the grace of God is with us as long as we remain faithful to him.



# A Commentary on The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy

## Greeting

- **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 (Second Timothy 1:1-2).**

That salutation is very similar to the one he wrote in his first letter to Timothy mentioning his apostleship. Paul was very proud to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Remember, he had been a bitter and vicious persecutor of the Christ and his church before the Lord appeared to him in the vision. When Paul learned the truth he quickly repented and began to boldly proclaim Jesus as the Christ, even though it meant he too would then be persecuted bitterly and viciously.

Paul said he was an apostle of Christ through the will of God. Although Jesus appeared in the vision to Paul and chose him, Jesus never did anything that was not through the will of God. As Jesus said to the Jews, **“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).

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he said he was an apostle of Jesus Christ according to a commandment of God. While in this one he said it was according to the promise of the life in Christ Jesus. Both statements are true. Paul’s apostleship was according to the promise of the life in Christ Jesus, because life in Christ Jesus is eternal life. And all who believe and obey him have the promise of eternal life. As Jesus said to the Jews about those who follow him, **“I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10).

As in his first letter to him, Paul referred to Timothy as a genuine child in faith. Here he referred to him as a beloved child. Timothy was not only a child of God, but he was also like a beloved child to Paul. He was like a beloved child to him because Timothy was a much younger man, and Timothy acted toward Paul as a son to his father. Nevertheless, Paul never said to Timothy or to any other man, “My son.” And neither Timothy nor any other disciple of Christ ever addressed Paul as, “Father Paul.” Jesus condemned such designations among us (see Matthew 23:8-11).

As in his first letter to him, Paul called for grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ be to Timothy. Grace, mercy, and peace are for all who are faithful to God and Christ. Their grace is loving kindness to us; their mercy is forgiveness of our sins; and their peace is the kind that surpasses understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

Paul, when mentioning God and Christ together, he always indicated their distinctiveness. God is the Father, and Christ Jesus is our Lord. The idea of the trinity that the two of them are the same person is a false one. And I have no doubt that Jesus condemns it, because the testimony of the Bible denies it.

## Paul's good memories of him

- **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 1:3-5).

Since Paul writes in such a concise way there are many things he says in that short passage. He said he had gratitude to God. We should all have gratitude to our God because as the only true God he is the source of our life and all of our blessings.

Paul said he served God from the forefathers in a pure conscience. The forefathers of the Hebrews were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from which came the nation of Israel, which was God's chosen nation until the church. Paul served God by walking in the steps of the faith and obedience of the forefathers. Jesus was the climax of that faith and obedience. It was God that Paul served, and he serve him first from the knowledge he gained from the forefathers, then from the knowledge he gained from Christ.

Paul also said he served God in a pure conscience. Although Paul persecuted Christ and his church, it was because of his conscience not against it. He actually believed he was serving God by opposing Christ and his church. His conscience was pure, but it was very misled. Therefore, we must never trust our conscience only. We must live by our conscience, but we must be sure our conscience is not misled. And that is done by the careful study of the will of God for us that is recorded in the Bible, which is the word of God.

Paul then told Timothy how much love he had for him. In his supplications to God he had unceasing remembrance about him. Night and day he longed to see him so that he might be filled with joy. When Paul said he remembered Timothy's tears, he was probably referring to the time he departed from him. Timothy may have wept at Paul's departure because he was fearful for him, and he may have thought he might never see him again. Fathers and mothers weep when their sons go off to war.

It is good for us to express our love so that we can know how much we love each other. Remember this proverb: **"Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden"** (Proverbs 27:5). Nevertheless remember, to be effective, there are good and bad ways to express our love, depending upon many things. And there are times to express it and times to refrain, depending upon many circumstances. As Solomon said, **"For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: ... a time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace"** (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8).

Paul also said he remembered the non-hypocritical faith that was in Timothy. Hypocrisy is a form of deceit where a man pretends to be something more than what he is. There have always been hypocrites, and there always will be in the world, but God hates hypocrisy. Indeed, Jesus uttered curses against the scholars, the Pharisees, and the lawyers for their hypocrisy (see for example Matthew 23 and Luke 11).

Paul told how non-hypocritical faith first dwelt in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice. Remember, Timothy's mother was a Jew but his father was Gentile. When Paul said that non-hypocritical faith first dwelt in his grandmother and his mother that indicates they were the first to have faith in Jesus Christ. And they no doubt introduced Christ to Timothy. The faith that dwelt in them was non-hypocritical, and Paul was persuaded it was in Timothy also. He was persuaded because he saw how Timothy lived and applied his faith.

## God did not give us a spirit of cowardice

- **Because of which reason I remind thee to rekindle the gift of God that is in thee through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of soberness** (Second Timothy 1:6-7).

Paul was able to give Timothy a special gift of the Holy Spirit with the laying on of his hands because Paul was an apostle. What that particular gift was is not told, because the scriptures mention several different kinds of gifts. God gives all of us some kinds of gifts (but no longer supernatural ones), and we all need to be reminded to rekindle those gifts so that we can serve him and bear fruit for righteousness.

We need to apply our gifts from God boldly and without fear, because Paul said that God did not give us a spirit of cowardice. The Holy Spirit that is within us is one of power, and of love, and of soberness. God no longer gives us supernatural powers, but the spirit of power we do have is sufficient for us to accomplish many things. People are often surprised at how much they can accomplish when they persevere in applying themselves.

The spirit of love that God has given us motivates us to apply our talents and our energies to be helpful in whatever ways we can. The effects of a spirit of love can be seen especially during times of disaster. Those without a spirit of love act lawlessly by looting, destroying, and preying upon the weak. Those who have a spirit of love will strive to save and protect others, and work to clean up what was destroyed and help rebuild again.

Those without a spirit of love sit around idle and complain in the midst of the destruction. Those with a spirit of love actively look for ways they can help undo the harmful effects of the disaster, even if it is only to gather trash. How a population responds to disasters reveals much about the kind of spirit they have.

Paul also mentioned how God gave us a spirit of soberness. Wise men have a spirit of soberness, while fools love their folly. Solomon wrote much contrasting wise men with fools. Here is one thing he said: **"Folly is joy to him who is void of wisdom, but a man of understanding makes his going straight"** (Proverbs 15:21).

## Suffer together with the good news

- **Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord nor of me his prisoner, but suffer together with the good news according to the power of God** (Second Timothy 1:8).

The testimony of our Lord and of Paul who served him is the word of God. But why would Paul tell Timothy not to be ashamed of that testimony? Being ashamed means being humiliated by something about yourself. People are ashamed when they do something wrong (if they have a conscience). Therefore, because the world hates the genuine word of God and considers it foolish, people can be ashamed of confessing their faith in it.

For example, the Bible record about the creation is ridiculed by the world because they champion the theory of evolution. Hence, unless a man's conviction is strong, he will be ashamed to confess his faith in the Bible record. That means we must strengthen our faith so that we will not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord nor of anyone who proclaims it.

Instead of being ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, and of men like Paul who served him, we should be willing to suffer together for it. The good news of Christ is that part of the word of God that offers us salvation and eternal life. And those things are according to the power of God, who alone can save us and give us eternal life.

The world scoffs at the genuine word of God, and they persecute all who believe it. Jesus was persecuted to the point of death on the cross. Paul was persecuted frequently and severely because he proclaimed the good news of Christ. And we too should be willing to suffer together with them because of our faith. Never be ashamed of it, but proudly confess your faith in Christ and his good news of our salvation. Nevertheless, be not a fool, as some men have, and seek persecution nor provoke it unnecessarily.

## The blessing of the good news of Christ

- **Who saved us and who called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal. But which has now been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who indeed abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the good news, for which I was appointed a herald, and an apostle, and a teacher of Gentiles (Second Timothy 1:9-11).**

God saved us and called us with a holy calling. He saved us by sending his son Jesus Christ to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. And it is through Christ that we are called for that redemption and salvation. It is a holy calling because Christ of all men lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father in all holiness. That is how he earned the right to redeem us. We were called with a holy calling so that we too can be holy. And that is done when we believe in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, are immersed in water for the remission of them, and obey him in all things.

Our salvation and calling were not according to our works. They were not something we earned from God, because our salvation is much too great to be earned by any of us. Only a life of perfect obedience could earn it for us. And no mere man has the strength of character and spirit to live without sin. Only Jesus Christ was able, but he was more than a mere man, he was the only begotten Son of God.

God knew before the beginning, before times eternal, that we would be unable to save ourselves. Therefore, it was his purpose to show his grace to us by sending his only begotten Son Jesus Christ into the world to redeem us and save our souls from condemnation. That was his plan to defeat his enemies.

God's purpose and grace was manifested by the appearing of the Son of God, our Savior Jesus Christ. Sin is the cause of all death. And Paul said that Christ "**condemned sin in the flesh ...**" (Romans 8:3). He condemned it by proving that sin is not inevitable. No doubt one of the arguments used by the devil and his disciples against God and his only begotten Son was that we are not like they are, and therefore we cannot keep from sinning. The Son of God not only disproved that argument by living sinlessly in the world as a man, thus condemning sin, but he proved his moral and spiritual superiority. That way he abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through his good news of our salvation.

True life is eternal life; it never dies; it is immortal. Before Jesus brought his good news of salvation to us little was known about eternal life. The record of the Old Testament only alludes to it. Jesus brought eternal life to light through his message of good news. It is brought to light in two ways: first, by our knowledge of it, and second, by our access to it.

Paul said he was appointed

a herald

an apostle

a teacher of Gentiles

He was appointed those three things for the good news of Christ. A herald is a man who makes proclamations and announcements. And that is what Paul did with the good news. And an apostle is a man who is sent on a mission.

Paul was also a teacher of the Gentiles, because when Jesus appeared to Paul in the vision, he told how he was sending him to teach them: "**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 26:16-18).

## Be not ashamed but confident

- **Because of which reason I also suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to preserve my consignment for that day** (Second Timothy 1:12).

That is another beautiful and well known passage written by Paul. He was a prisoner in chains. He had suffered many painful trials, tribulations, and persecutions because of the good news of Christ. He had suffered those things because the good news of Christ is hated by the world. Yet Paul was not ashamed. He was not disappointed or disheartened or regretful.

Instead, he was proud and joyful, because he knew him whom he had believed. Notice how Paul said he knew him whom he had believed. His conviction about Christ was so strong that it was no longer believing but knowing. Faith can change to knowledge in the heart of a man. That is why many men claim the evolution of species is a fact; their faith in it is so strong. But their knowledge is a lie, because they are misled by a great delusion. Paul's knowledge was true, because Christ had proven himself to Paul without doubt. Therefore, Paul was persuaded that he was able to preserve his consignment for that day.

A consignment is something that is delivered and entrusted to someone else. Paul's consignment no doubt consisted of the treasures that Jesus spoke about, when he said to his disciples, **“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). Paul said he believed in him, and was persuaded that he was able to preserve those treasures, his consignment, for that day, the day when he would be in heaven.

We too should prepare a consignment for our Lord by laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven. And we should follow in the steps of Paul and be persuaded with him that Jesus our Lord is preserving those treasures for when we are in heaven with him.

And like Paul, we should be willing to suffer for the good news of Christ. Like Paul we should not be ashamed regardless of how much the world hates us, but we too should know him whom we have believed. And like Paul we too should be persuaded that our Lord is able to preserve our consignment for the day of our afterlife in heaven.

## Hold the pattern of sound words

- **Hold the pattern of sound words that thou heard from me, in faith and love in Christ Jesus** (Second Timothy 1:13).

A pattern is a model or standard used to guide the creation of other things. Sound words are those about truth and righteousness. And since there is an almost limitless number of ways to express sound words, there is an almost limitless number of ways to apply truth and perform righteousness. Therefore, we need patterns of sound words to guide us in our applications of truth and acts of righteousness.

One simple example of a pattern of sound words is this commandment that Jesus gave his apostles: **“This is my commandment, that ye love each other, just as I have loved you”** (John 15:12). Loving each other is a pattern about how we treat each other. It is a pattern because there is no one way to do it; there are numerous ways to apply our love. And Jesus is our model to show us how we can apply our love.

The sound words that Paul spoke about were those that he gave to Timothy. And we have those words in these two letters that he wrote to him. We should use those sound words as a pattern for how we should live, and we should hold that pattern. We should hold it because there is no greater pattern of sound words than those contained in the word of God.

Paul also said we should hold the pattern of sound words (from the Bible) in faith and love in Christ Jesus. We hold the pattern of sound words in faith because we trust what our Lord and Savior has spoken to us. We trust them to guide us rightly in this dark and sinful world. And we trust they will guide us to eternal life. And not only do we have faith in the pattern of sound words, but we love them. We love them because they were given to us by our Lord. And our faith and love in the pattern of sound words is in Christ. We believe in them and we love them because we are in Christ; we belong to him.

Moreover, the sound words of the Bible have proven to be the best and the wisest to show us how we should live in this sinful world, because they promote justice and righteousness. They are words of true wisdom. And Solomon said, **“Get wisdom, get understanding. Do not forget, nor decline from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve thee. Love her, and she will keep thee.**

**“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 4:5-9).

## Guard the good consignment

- **Guard the good consignment through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us** (Second Timothy 1:14).

Remember, a consignment is something that is delivered and entrusted to someone else. The good consignment that God has given to us in this life is his kingdom on the earth (the church) and his holy word, the Bible. And it is our sacred duty to guard those things.

Genuine disciples of Christ continue striving to protect the church of Christ from the pollutions and the perversions of the world that continually threaten it in so many seductive ways. It was a struggle from the beginning to protect the church and preserve the truth of the good news of Christ. And it continues to be a struggle. Therefore, we must always be vigilant to guard that good consignment.

And Paul said we must guard it through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. The Holy Spirit is a living force of divine energy that dwells in our minds both guiding us and motivating us to do that which is good, right, and just. It guides us by the knowledge and understanding we have of the word of God. And it motivates us by the feelings we have in our conscience.

Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about it: **“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), and, **“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).

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic force from God himself that lives in us, and works with our own spirit to help us live right. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit no longer endows any man

with supernatural powers or divinely inspired knowledge. Those things were only given before the New Testament was written. But now they are no longer needed. The Bible is sufficient for us to develop faith in Christ and knowledge of spiritual things.

## Those who turned away from him

- **This thou know, that all those in Asia turned away from me, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (Second Timothy 1:15).**

Remember, the land that the Bible calls Asia is now called Asia Minor. It was one of the places where Paul did most of his evangelism and established many congregations. And it is the place that contained the seven congregations to which the book of Revelation was addressed: **“John, to the seven congregations in Asia: Grace to you and peace from God ...”** (Revelation 1:4).

Who Paul meant by all those in Asia is not clear. It is unlikely that all the congregations turned from him. He was probably referring to specific men who had been serving and assisting him in his work there. They may have turned away from him because of his prolonged bondage, being separated from them. This is the only place in the Bible that says anything about Phygellus and Hermogenes. Paul may have mentioned them because they had been more active with him. Nevertheless, all of that is conjecture because nobody knows.

## A blessing upon the house of Onesiphorus

- **May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he happened to be in Rome he sought me more diligently and found me (may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day), and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus, thou know very well (Second Timothy 1:16-18).**

Onesiphorus is only mentioned in this book. Therefore, we know nothing about him except what Paul says in that passage. From the things that Onesiphorus did for Paul he showed himself to be a genuine disciple of Christ. Paul said Onesiphorus often refreshed him. There are many ways to refresh a man. He can be refreshed both in his body and in his spirit. The best way to refresh a man is to find out what he needs and then provide for him.

Paul also said that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his chain. Being a prisoner accused of crimes is a shameful thing. It was shameful for Christ on the cross, and he despised the shame, as the author of the book of Hebrews says: **“Therefore we also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, having put off every weight and cleverly entangling sin, let us run by perseverance the contest being set before us. Looking to Jesus the Pathfinder and perfecter of the faith, who, against the joy set before him, endured a cross, having despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Neither Jesus nor Paul were guilty of any crimes, yet they suffered the shame of being in bondage. Onesiphorus would not let those false accusations turn him away from Paul. He was not ashamed of Paul's chain. Although few of us will ever be imprisoned for our faith and righteousness, we are going to be slandered. And people will be tempted to become ashamed because of accusations against us. Be like Onesiphorus, and remain faithful to innocent men who are slandered.

When Onesiphorus happened to be in Rome he sought Paul more diligently and found him. That was another way that Onesiphorus proved himself to be a genuine friend and spiritual brother to Paul. And we too should expend time and energy to help a friend and Christian brother in his time of need. That is what true love does, as Solomon said, "**A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity**" (Proverbs 17:17).

Besides all of those things, Paul said that Onesiphorus ministered many things to him at Ephesus. Onesiphorus was consistently helpful to Paul, and he was helpful in many ways. And Paul said that Timothy knew it very well. He probably knew it very well because he was there and observed what Onesiphorus did.

By his works Onesiphorus proved himself to be a true friend and brother to Paul. He was a rare jewel of a friend, because Solomon said, "**Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find?**" (Proverbs 20:6).

Onesiphorus deserved all those praises. Therefore, Paul called upon the Lord to grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day, the great day of judgment at the end of the world. Let us all show our love to God and each other by our good deeds, even in times of persecution, so that we can find mercy from the Lord in that day.

## Be strong in the grace

- **Thou therefore, my child, be strong in the grace in Christ Jesus** (Second Timothy 2:1).

The grace in Christ Jesus is our redemption. By his life of perfect obedience, Jesus earned the right from God to redeem all who belong to him. And our redemption is not because of our righteousness, but because of his grace toward us. It is a gift given to all who believe and obey him, because it cannot be earned.

Being strong in the grace in Christ Jesus means to be strong in our faith and obedience to him. Being strong means being powerful, and able to work strenuously even against resistance. And as Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong in the grace of Christ, we too should be powerful and work strenuously even against opposition.

## Commit the word to faithful men

- **And what thou have heard from me through many witnesses, these things commit thou to faithful men who will be competent to teach others also** (Second Timothy 2:2).

The things that Paul wanted Timothy to commit to faithful men included not only what he had been writing to him, but also to the things he heard from him through many other wit-

nesses. In other words, Timothy was to commit to faithful men all of the things that Paul had been proclaiming. Those things needed to be committed to faithful men who were competent to teach others also.

And we too need to commit to faithful men all of the things that Paul had been proclaiming, as well as the whole word of God. The Bible contains many things that Paul wrote to different people. And they need to be taught to faithful men who are competent to teach others also. The treasures of knowledge in the Bible are useless unless they are taught and planted in the minds of righteous men. And that process must be continual because new souls are continually being brought into the world.

Notice how Paul referred to things Timothy heard from him through many witnesses. Hearing things about the word of God from one man is not sufficient, because there are too many deceivers in the world. We must learn the word of God from many witnesses. And the most important witnesses are the men who wrote the books of the Bible, because their testimony was inspired by the very Holy Spirit of God.

Notice also that Paul told Timothy to commit what he heard from him to men who were both faithful and competent to teach others. A man can be faithful but incompetent to teach. And a man can be competent to teach but be unfaithful. It is therefore, important for the disciples of Christ to select both faithful men and skillful men to teach others the word of God.

## Being a good soldier of Christ

- **Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (Second Timothy 2:3-7).**

Paul spoke of Timothy as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. There are two other passages that speak of men being fellow soldiers of Paul: **“But I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and co-workman and fellow soldier, and your messenger and servant of my need ...”** (Philippians 2:25), and, **“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and co-workman, and to the beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the congregation at thy house”** (Philemon 1:1-2).

However, we are all soldiers of Christ. For in the last part of his letter to the Ephesians Paul spoke of how every disciple is fighting in the spiritual war between God and the devil, which means we are all soldiers of Christ: **“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.**

**“Because of this 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 6:10-17).

## The duties and rewards of service

- **No man who serves in the military entangles himself in the affairs of life, so that he may please the man who enlisted the army. And also if any man competes, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully. The farmer who labors must be the first to partake of the fruits. Consider what I say, for may the Lord give thee understanding in all things** (Second Timothy 2:3-7).

We must not allow ourselves to be entangled in the affairs of this life lest we be unfruitful in our service to Christ. Remember the parable Jesus gave about sowing seed on different kinds of ground. In his explanation of its meaning, he said this about one kind: **“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”** (Mark 4:18-19).

Paul then spoke of competing in athletic events where the winner is given a crown. But it is only given to the winner if he competes lawfully. The lesson is that God will give us a crown if we live right. And that means to love him, because James said, **“Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him”** (James 1:12).

And John said that to love him means to obey him: **“For this is the love of God, that we may keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome”** (First John 5:3). Therefore, to be given a crown by God we must love him and keep his commandments.

Paul also spoke of the laboring farmer deserving to be the first to partake of the fruits. The lesson there is that if we want to partake of the glories of heaven then we must labor for them. That does not mean we can earn them, because, like life itself, they are too costly. It means God will give them to us if we labor for him. For Paul said, **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, become ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not empty in the Lord”** (First Corinthians 15:58).

After saying those things about soldiers, athletes, and farmers, Paul told Timothy to consider what he said. And we too must consider what Paul said, because what he said was inspired by the Holy Spirit, which means it is holy scripture, the word of God.

Paul also called upon the Lord to give Timothy understanding in all things. It is the Lord who gives us understanding, because without him no man can understand anything. That is why God’s enemies cannot understand the true meaning of the good news of Christ and the hope that it gives us. Therefore, let us all pray to God that he will give us understanding in all things; all things that are important and significant about him, his holy word, and his will for us. And that will happen when we study and meditate about the words of the Bible.

## Paul endured all things because of the chosen

- **Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my good news, within which I suffer evil to the point of bonds as an evildoer, but the word of God is not bound. Because of this I endure all things: because of the chosen, so that they also may experience salvation in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory** (Second Timothy 2:8-10).

The message of Christ is called the good news because there are so many wonderful things about it. It tells how much God loves us; it tells us how we can be saved from the condemnations of the devil; it tells us how to live to please God; it tells us how to join God's kingdom and become his sons for eternity.

Part of the good news is knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And evidence of it is that he was raised from the dead, never to die again. That knowledge is very important for us to know, because God has promised to raise us up the same way if we believe and obey Christ.

Indeed, 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). However, he also said, **"But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruit of those who are asleep"** (First Corinthians 15:20).

It is also important to know that Jesus was of the seed of David, because that was prophesied. And it was common knowledge among the Jews that the Messiah would be a son of David. Here is what Jehovah said to David about that: **"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. 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).

Therefore, those who believed in Jesus called him the son of David. For example, remember this passage about Jesus from Matthew's biography of him: **"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). Hence, the knowledge that Jesus was raised from the dead, and was of the seed of David, are a part of the good news.

Paul said the knowledge about Jesus was according to his good news. Men have proclaimed good news about many things. But the good news that Paul proclaimed was the same that Jesus proclaimed. And just as Jesus suffered evil as an evildoer, so also Paul said he was suffering evil as an evildoer. And just as it was within the good news that Jesus suffered, so also it was within the good news that Paul suffered. Paul could say he was within the good news because the good news came from Christ and his apostles.

Paul said he suffered within the good news to the point of bonds, but the word of God was not bound. The word of God will never be bound. The Catholic Church tried for a thousand years to bind the word of God, keeping it from the people. They even burned the

Englishman Tyndale on the stake because he translated the word of God into English so his people could read it. Yet because of the labors of righteous men the word of God can now be purchased in English for about the cost of a loaf of bread.

Paul also said he endured all things because of the chosen so they also might experience salvation in Christ, with eternal glory. When we become disciples of Christ we are both saved (from the condemnation of our past sins) through the redemption of Christ, and are given the hope of eternal glory with him in heaven.

## Doing all things together

- **Faithful is the saying. For if we die together, we will also live together. If we endure, we will also reign together** (Second Timothy 2:11-12).

The faithful saying is that we will experience salvation in Christ, in his kingdom, with eternal glory. That is the essence of the hope we have in his good news. Christ has promised that if we die with him, we will also live with him. Remember what he said to his disciples and to the multitude that was following him: **“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).

Losing our life with him means forsaking our worldly life and living according to the will of God. The apostles all forsook their worldly lives when they followed Jesus. We must not only die to our (sinful) worldly life, but we must endure sufferings as Jesus did for the kingdom of God. We must endure to the end, because Jesus also said, **“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 13:13).

## Renouncing

- **If we renounce him, that man will also renounce us. If we are unfaithful, that man remains faithful. He cannot renounce himself** (Second Timothy 2:12-13).

The teaching that once we are saved we will always be saved is very popular. However, if it were true, then how could Paul say that if we renounced Christ, he will also renounce us? But the truth is we can be lost after we have been saved, because salvation is an ongoing process. It is a lifelong process that is not completed until our lives in the world are over.

Men can become unfaithful and renounce him. But Christ is always faithful and will never renounce us—if we remain faithful to him. His promises to us are the only things that are guaranteed in this vain world. Remember what Solomon said about the world: **“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Everything eventually fails, including our lives. Only the hope we have in Christ will never fail.

If Christ were unfaithful to us he would be renouncing himself. But that will never happen because he cannot renounce himself. The mighty character of his Spirit makes that impos-

sible. He can no more renounce himself than he can stop existing. And developing that Christ-like character is what we should all strive for.

## Do not brawl verbally

- **Remind them of these things, solemnly testifying in the sight of the Lord, not to brawl verbally, to nothing useful, to the ruin of those who hear** (Second Timothy 2:14).

When Paul said to remind them, he was referring to the chosen, those who belong to Christ. We need to often be reminded of the things of the good news of Christ so that they can continually light our way in this dark world of sin. That is one important purpose of our regular assemblies together.

Paul also commanded Timothy to solemnly testify in the sight of the Lord not to brawl verbally. Brawling physically is certainly to be avoided. But brawling verbally is much more common. Those who brawl verbally yell and shout, and utter insults and accusations against each other. Often those who debate with us about our faith will try to provoke a verbal brawl with us when they see they are not succeeding in their arguments.

Brawling verbally does nothing useful, but only ruins those who hear. Resist it even if you are severely provoked. Verbal brawls are like physical brawls. They are unproductive and destructive. They commonly leave behind bitter memories and hatreds. Jesus often engaged in disputes with people, but he never engaged in a verbal brawl.

Probably the best example in the Bible record of a verbal brawl is when Paul was accused by the Jewish council before a Roman captain. Paul quickly learned that he was not going to get a fair trial from those Jews. Hence, he shrewdly turned them against each other. Here is that story: **“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.**

**“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 23:6-10).

## Be diligent to present thyself approved

- **Be diligent to present thyself approved to God, an irreproachable workman, correctly traversing the word of truth** (Second Timothy 2:15).

Being approved to God is our most important purpose in life. For without his approval we will be condemned to the lake of fire with the devil and the demons. With his approval we

will become sons of God for eternity in heaven with him. What could possibly be more important for us than that?

Therefore, we must be diligent about it. Being approved to God is not some minor aspect of our life the way so many people view it. His approval requires diligence because it requires our obedience to him. And our obedience requires that we sacrifice our selfish desires, and instead labor to bear good fruit of righteousness, and resist the many temptations of this world.

Remember what Jesus said about being accepted as a follower of him: **“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).

Being approved to God means being an irreproachable workman. Being irreproachable means living righteously without guilt. And a workman is a man who works. No man can be approved to God who does not work diligently for him. And there are many ways we can do that. Working for God includes every kind of way to do things that are good and right and just.

Remember what Paul said to the Colossians: **“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).

Paul also commanded Timothy to correctly traverse the word of truth. The word of truth is the word of God, which is in the Holy Bible. And correctly traversing it means both to correctly interpret what it says and correctly apply it. The Greek word for correctly traversing literally means to make a straight path through difficult terrain.

Therefore, part of our diligence to present ourselves approved to God is to correctly interpret his holy word and correctly apply it to our lives. And the major purpose of my commentary of the New Testament is to help you correctly understand and apply the word of God to your lives.

## Shun profane babblings

- **But shun profane babblings, for they will advance to greater impiety, and their word will have a feeding field like gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who missed the mark about the truth, saying the resurrection happened already, and they overthrow the faith of some** (Second Timothy 2:16-18).

Profane means unclean and irreverent. And babblings refer to foolish and meaningless talk. Hence, profane babblings involve talk that is unclean, irreverent, foolish, and meaningless. The false philosophies and religions of the world are profane babblings. They are profane because they pollute the minds of people and lead them astray from the truth of God. They are babblings because their ideas are foolish and meaningless compared with the truth of the word of God.

When Paul speaks of “they” and “their” in that passage he is referring to men who engage in profane babblings. He said such men would advance to greater impiety. False philosophies and religions have proven time and again to drag people down morally and spiritually. And that drags them down in every other way. Just look at what communism did to Russia. Look what Hinduism is doing to India, and what Islam is doing to the Arab countries, and what humanism is doing to Europe and America.

Paul also said the word of such men would have a feeding field like gangrene. Gangrene is when the tissue of a body begins to decay. And that provides a feeding field for all manner of loathsome creatures. In the same way the false philosophies and religions of the world nourish all manner of loathsome practices.

Every idea that justifies sin and foolishness is an example. I could give many specific examples, but they are too disgusting to write about in my commentary. Besides, volumes have already been written, although the world does not like to publicize them. Seek and you will find them if you really want to know.

Paul spoke of Hymenaeus in his first letter to Timothy, when he said, **“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 1:19-20). Besides those two in the books of Timothy there are no other passages in the Bible about either Hymenaeus or Philetus.

Those two men were merely examples of profane babblings. Paul said they missed the mark about the truth of the resurrection. They were saying it happened already, which was overthrowing the faith of some. Profane babblings are not limited to false philosophies and religions. Some of the things that are proclaimed as the good news of Christ are profane babblings like those of Hymenaeus and Philetus. An example is the effort to use the theory of evolution to explain the Creation. That is one reason it is very important to study the Bible for yourself. Otherwise you risk having your faith overthrown by such false ideas.

## The firm foundation of God

- **Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, The Lord knows those who are his, and, Let every man who names the name of the Lord keep away from unrighteousness** (Second Timothy 2:19).

Regardless of all the profane babblings of the world, Paul said the firm foundation of God stands. A foundation is that which supports something. And God not only created everything, but he supports everything. The energy of his Spirit continually supports and sustains the world. I explain how he does that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

However, Paul is here speaking of God’s firm foundation of our soul’s salvation. And that foundation is Christ, because Paul said to the Corinthians, **“For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”** (First Corinthians 3:11). Christ is the foundation of our faith and hope. And that foundation is firm like a rock. For the psalmist said, **“O come, let us sing to Jehovah. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation”** (Psalm 95:1).

Paul also spoke of the seal of God's foundation. A seal is that which confirms and authenticates. And Paul told of two things that confirm and authenticate God's firm foundation for us. The first tells of God's part, while the second tells of our part. Both together confirm and authenticate our salvation through Christ.

Here is a summary of what Paul said about the surety of our salvation: first, because the Lord knows those who are his, and second, when we identify ourselves with him and keep away from unrighteousness. Knowing the first helps strengthen our faith. And knowing the second helps strengthen our righteousness.

## Vessels for different works

- **Now in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wood and earthen, and some for esteem and some for disesteem** (Second Timothy 2:20-21).

Paul's reference to a great house and its vessels symbolizes an organization and its members. As the vessels of a great house differ in quality and value, so also the members of an organization differ in quality and value. As the vessels of a great house are used for different functions, so also the members of an organization are used for different functions.

Paul's analogy refers to the kingdom of God, the church, because all of the vessels in his analogy were useful for something. It does not refer to the world, because many souls in the world are like the useless chaff in a harvest that John the immerser spoke about (see Matthew 3:12).

And concerning our differences in the kingdom, Jesus spoke of those who were called great and those who were called least in the kingdom of the heavens: **“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”** (Matthew 5:17-19).

And remember how Paul spoke about the difference qualities of work that men do: **“For no man can lay another foundation besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. And if any man builds upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become manifest.**

**For the day will make it known, because it is revealed by fire. And the fire will test each man's work of what kind it is. If any man's work that he built on will remain, he will receive benefit. If any man's work will be burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but so as through fire”** (First Corinthians 3:11-15).

## Purging ourselves

- **If therefore any man purges himself from these things, he will be a vessel for esteem, sanctified and useful to the master, prepared for every good work** (Second Timothy 2:20-21).

Paul did not explain what he meant by “these things” in that passage. However, from the context we can see that he was referring to everything that is foolish, unholy, and perverse. When we purge ourselves of those things then we will be a vessel for esteem. We will be sanctified and useful to our master Jesus Christ, prepared for every good work.

Among the things we need to purge from ourselves are the juvenile impulses that Paul mentions in the next passage. That is one of the important purposes of the discipline and education that we receive when we are young. It is a time of purging the foolishness that is bound up in our young hearts, because Solomon said, **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”** (Proverbs 22:15).

The most important thing about education is not learning some kind of craft or trade or profession, but developing character. For that is the foundation of our lives. Purging ourselves of everything that is foolish, unholy, and perverse is the best preparation for any kind of good work. It is like purging the dross from ore, or refining out the impurities of liquids. Purification is the first and most important thing that must be done to make raw materials useful.

## Flee juvenile impulses, pursue righteousness

- **And flee juvenile impulses, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart** (Second Timothy 2:22).

Juvenile impulses produce foolishness. We all need to flee from them, and the sooner the better. Children who subdue their juvenile impulses and become more mature in their lives are greatly admired as having great potential for achievement. And contrary to the lies of the world, they also become happier and more contented.

We all need to encourage our children (gently and patiently but firmly) to follow the example of our Savior. Remember when his father and mother lost him in Jerusalem. The record says, **“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. And he went down with them, 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 2:46-52).

When we are freed from the bondage of juvenile impulses we are better able to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And we can do those good things together with all who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. A man with a pure heart is one who flees from juvenile impulses and seeks to purged himself from everything that is foolish, unholy, and perverse.

Remember however, it is impossible to purge completely every foolish, unholy, and perverse thought from our fleshly minds. Our duty is to oppose every such thought whenever they come into our consciousness.

## Shun foolish and ignorant questions

- **But shun foolish and ignorant questions, knowing that they breed quarrels** (Second Timothy 2:23).

Men who genuinely want to know the truth do not ask foolish and ignorant questions. Fools and scoffers speak that way. Men who ask foolish and ignorant questions seek not truth but a quarrel. An example of a foolish and ignorant question is this one: If God created everything who created him? It has no answer because God has always existed. And how that is possible is a mystery that is far beyond our capability to understand. Only fools and scoffers demand the answers to such questions because they love to quarrel.

Therefore, Paul warned against even responding to them. Solomon also said, **“Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words”** (Proverbs 23:9), and, **“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like to him”** (Proverbs 26:4).

An exception to ignoring them would involve a child’s foolish and ignorant question. It would be appropriate to respond to them, at least as they are able to understand. Another exception would perhaps be to apply this proverb: **“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit”** (Proverbs 26:5). In other words, expose his folly for what it is.

## Meekly correcting those who oppose

- **And a bondman of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in meekness correcting those who oppose** (Second Timothy 2:24-25).

Conflicts and disagreements of some kind are impossible to avoid. Quarrels, however, are a form of conflict that should be avoided. A quarrel is an angry dispute, like fighting with words. Quarrels rarely accomplish anything good, except perhaps for remorse about what provoked it. Therefore, Paul said that a bondman of the Lord must not quarrel.

Paul then mentioned four things that we should do instead of quarreling:

- be gentle to all
- be able to teach
- be patient
- in meekness correct those who oppose.

Gentleness, meekness and patience all contrast with quarreling. And teaching the truth is beneficial in contrast with the destructiveness of quarreling.

We must correct those who oppose us with meekness, gentleness, patience, and with teaching. Those things are characteristics of love, not anger and hatred. They also require strength of character and emotional maturity. It is easy to quarrel. It is difficult and challenging to use meekness, gentleness, patience, and teaching. But by doing those things instead of quarreling we show ourselves to be children of God.

## Recognizing the truth and sobering up

- **Perhaps God may grant them repentance in 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).

Men must repent before they can escape the snare of the devil and be saved. To prepare the people for Christ, John the immerser preached that men should repent (see Matthew 3:2). And when Christ began his ministry he first preached that men should repent (see Matthew 4:17). However, Paul spoke of God granting men repentance.

When God judges a man worthy of salvation he will open his eyes in recognition of the truth so that he will repent. Remember this passage: **“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”** (John 12:37-40).

God can both open the eyes of men to see or blind them so that they cannot see. When God judges a man worthy of salvation he will open his eyes to recognition of the truth. In that way he grants them repentance, because when a man who is worthy of salvation recognizes and acknowledges the truth he will “be turned,” which means he will repent.

Recognizing the truth and repenting will bring a man to his senses so that he can escape out of the snare of the devil. Living in sin is being in the snare of the devil. He wants to capture us so that we will do his will, which accomplishes two things for him: First it will destroy our soul because he hates us, and second, it will give him more power in his competition with God. The devil hates us because we have the potential to become sons of God for eternity, but he does not. He does not because of what he has made of himself.

## Perilous times will come

- **But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, impious, devoid of natural affection, irreconcilable, slanderous, without self-control, savage, no lovers of good, traitors,**

**reckless, beclouded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of piety, but repudiating the power of it** (Second Timothy 3:1-5).

What Paul meant by the last days was simply the future. The reason is because a specific word for future is not found in the Bible.

The author of Hebrews speaks of the last days when he refers to the era of Christ: **“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). The era of Christ (our era) is called the last days because there will be no more eras in the world.

Paul prophesied that perilous times would come in the future because there would be an increase in evil. The Bible record clearly shows a cyclic pattern between the prevalence of good and the prevalence of evil. And Paul here describes the perils of when evil prevails. Evil prevails when men become evil, such as being

- lovers of self
- lovers of money
- boasters
- arrogant
- blasphemous
- disobedient to parents
- ungrateful
- impious
- devoid of natural affection
- irreconcilable
- slanderous
- without self-control
- savage
- no lovers of good
- traitors
- reckless
- beclouded
- lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God
- having a form of piety, but repudiating the power of it

As with other lists of things that Paul has given, that long list of evils is a sample. It should not be considered inclusive, because men are capable of being evil in an almost limitless number of ways.

Also that list does not describes different kinds of evil men. For when a man acts evil in one way he commonly acts evil in many other ways. For example, you do not find men who are only lovers of self but righteous in everything else. You do not find men who are only disobedient to parents but righteous in everything else. You do not find men who are only impious but righteous in everything else.

I am not going to elaborate about most of those particular evils, because they are self-explanatory. Regarding natural affection, it is natural to love those who love us. But those who are devoid of natural affection have made themselves incapable to having affection

for anyone. Like the devil himself, they have hearts of stone: **“His heart is as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone”** (Job 41:24).

What Paul means by being beclouded is probably the mental dullness of sinners regarding spiritual things. Their minds are beclouded about God and his will for us. They are like spiritual drunkards.

### Turn away from these men

- **Now turn away from these men, for from these are those who creep into houses, and take captive frivolous women laden with sins, being led away by various impulses, ever learning and never able to come to knowledge of truth** (Second Timothy 3:5-7).

Although evil men are evil in most things they do, they do not all pursue evil in the same ways. In the above passage Paul describes one kind of evil that they do. In this case they creep into houses and take captive frivolous women. Notice how he said they creep into houses. They do not enter like righteous men, but like burglars or like vermin. They enter houses that way because they know they are doing evil.

The frivolous women they take captive are those who are laden with sins. They take them captive, not by force, but by seduction. Such women are easily seduced because they are frivolous, which means they are shallow minded and slaves of their impulses. That is why they are laden with sins.

Paul said such women are ever learning but never able to come to knowledge of truth. There are many people who are never able to come to knowledge of truth besides frivolous women. In fact, our modern colleges and universities are filled with professors who are that way. Their career is learning, but they are never able to come to knowledge of truth.

What Paul means by knowledge of truth is knowledge of God and his righteousness. They are not able to come to knowledge of truth because they hate God and his righteousness. They may learn what the Bible says, but they are unable to comprehend it and integrate what it teaches into their way of thinking.

### Men corrupted in mind

- **And by which way Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also do these oppose the truth. Men corrupted in mind, worthless about the faith. But they will not advance in much more, for their folly will be evident to all men, as also that of those men came to be** (Second Timothy 3:8-9).

This is the only passage in the Bible that mentions Jannes and Jambres. Jewish tradition claims they were the Egyptian magicians that opposed Moses in the presence of Pharaoh. However, that is only a conjecture. The fact is, who they were is a mystery.

Although Moses was directly chosen by Jehovah, there were many times when Moses was opposed, both by the Egyptians and by the Israelites. Why Paul gave the example of Jannes and Jambres is also a mystery. Nevertheless, a lesson we can get from what Paul

says about them is that evil men of corrupted minds will oppose the truth regardless of who proclaims it.

Every man who opposes the truth of God and his righteousness is corrupted in his mind. Therefore, they are worthless about the faith. Every one of us is born with a pure and undefiled spirit. However, we are also born with a body of flesh that has been corrupted by the premature knowledge of good and evil. Our duty is not only to love the good, but also to hate the evil. We must hate and oppose the evil to keep it from corrupting our minds.

Another lesson is that such men will not advance in much more. In other words, their opposition will not get very far. They may oppose the truth but their folly will be evident to all men. It may take some time, but they will be exposed as being foolish. The rulers of the Jews opposed Jesus, but now almost everyone knows how foolish they were.

### Virtues and sorrows

- **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** (Second Timothy 3:10-11).

Timothy closely followed the things about Paul for at least two reasons. One of which was because he was a very active and faithful helper of Paul. The other was because of his great love for him. We have no writings from Timothy to verify that, but it is clear from the things that Paul wrote that they both had great love for each other. In that passage Paul mentions many of Timothy's virtues, and his sorrows, which I list below:

doctrine  
conduct  
purpose  
faith  
longsuffering  
love  
perseverance  
persecutions  
sufferings

Timothy could testify about Paul, because he had closely followed much of Paul's life as an apostle of Christ. He had learned about his doctrine. He had seen his conduct. He knew the purpose of his efforts. He had witnessed Paul's faith at work. He had experienced longsuffering with him. He had seen proof of Paul's love for Christ and his church. He saw how Paul persevered in his work even while he was experiencing many persecutions and sufferings. Regarding his sufferings, Paul gave a much longer list of his sufferings in his second letter to the Corinthians (see 2Co 11).

The entire last half of the book of Acts is a record of Paul's work as an apostle of Christ. And from that alone you can learn much about his doctrine, conduct, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings.

Paul mentions the examples of his persecutions and sufferings at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. The Bible mentions two cities that were named Antioch. One of them was in Syria north of Israel. That Antioch contained something like a home congregation to Paul for a long time. The other Antioch was in Pisidia in the middle of Asia Minor. That was the city where Paul was persecuted.

Here is part of what the record says about his persecution in that Antioch of Asia Minor: **“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).

Here is what the record says about his persecution in Iconium: **“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”** (Acts 14:4-6).

And here is what the record says about his persecution in Lystra: **“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 14:19-20). It was in a later visit to Lystra when Paul first met Timothy.

Those are only a small sample of the persecutions and sufferings Paul experienced. Yet he could say that he endured such sufferings because the Lord rescued him out of them all.

## We will all be persecuted

- **And also all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted** (Second Timothy 3:12).

After that persecution at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe. Then the record says, **“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).

Notice how that passage says it is necessary for us to enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations. And Paul said that part of those tribulations will be persecutions. They are inescapable for **“all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus.”** Therefore, be prepared for them, and always remember it is necessary for us to enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations.

## Going astray

- **But evil men and fakers will go forward to worse, leading astray and being led astray** (Second Timothy 3:13).

Just as righteous men become progressively better as they live, so also evil men and fakers become progressively worse. Evil men do evil because they love evil. They love it because doing evil is easier than doing good, and the rewards of it are quicker. That makes it more addictive and leads to progressively worse evils.

Evil men are also fakers because deceit is necessary for them to succeed with their evil, and to avoid the punishments they deserve. Evil men mostly prey upon other people, especially the weak and the ignorant. They lead people astray so they can prey upon them. They conceal what they are like, and pretend to be righteous.

However, they themselves are led astray, because their rewards are deceitful. Solomon wrote much about the deceitful rewards of wickedness. For example, he said, **“His own iniquities shall take a wicked man, and he shall be held with the cords of his sin. He shall die for lack of instruction. And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray”** (Proverbs 5:22-23), and, **“A wicked man earns deceitful wages, but he who sows righteousness has a sure reward”** (Proverbs 11:18).

## What we learn

- **But continue thou in what thou learned and were convinced of, knowing from whom thou learned them** (Second Timothy 3:14).

What Paul meant by what Timothy learned were the things of the good news of Christ. Timothy had both learned them and was convinced of them. There is a big difference between what we learn and what we become convinced of. I have learned about many other religions, but I am not convinced of any of them.

Since Timothy had both learned about and was convinced about the things of good news, Paul told him to continue in them. Our salvation depends upon our continued faithfulness to Christ and his good news. For what the Lord said to the congregation in Smyrna applies to us as well: **“Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10).

Paul also reminded Timothy from whom it was that he learned them. It is very important for us to know from whom we learn things. Most of what we learn comes from the testimony of other people. We learn from our parents, from the things other people tell us, from the books we read, from the reports we receive from the broadcast media. A man who only knows what he himself has personally experienced is exceedingly ignorant.

And since the world is filled with false testimony it is very important for us to know from whom we learn things. Paul had proven to Timothy that he was a credible and reliable witness. Hence, he could trust what he had learned from Paul.

We all learn about Christ and his good news from the testimony of other people. However, people disagree on many things about Christ and his good news. Who then should we believe? Thank God that we now have the record of the testimony of Christ himself and that of his apostles, which are recorded in the New Testament of the Bible. All any man needs to do now is to verify for himself the truth of the bible by reading what it says. For the text itself is proof enough that it is from God.

The reason people disagree on many things about Christ and his good news is because they will not accept the testimony of the New Testament. They find many ways to dispute it and dismiss it. I was recently astonished to read in *New Bible Dictionary, Second Edition*, their claim that the apostle Paul condemned homosexuality, but not homosexuals. I wonder if the authors of that dictionary would say God condemns murder, but not murderers? How can scholars be so misled to be so stupid?

Nevertheless, most errors taught about the Bible are not so obvious. Therefore dear reader, if you genuinely want to know the truth about Christ and his good news, then study the Bible with an open mind and believe it. For we will all be judged by what it says, not by what other people say about it.

### The sacred writings

- **And that from a babe thou have known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus** (Second Timothy 3:15).

The sacred writings are those of the Bible, although none of the books of the New Testament had been written when Timothy was a child. Nevertheless, Paul said the sacred writings were able to make Timothy wise for salvation through faith in Christ. Paul quoted many passages from the Old Testament in his books when he was writing about the good news of Christ. And Christ himself quoted many passages from the Old Testament.

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament about Christ, and Jesus fulfilled them all. Those sacred writings can indeed make a man wise for salvation through faith in Christ. They make him wise about the truth of the good news. And it is through faith in Christ that we have our salvation.

### Every scripture is inspired by God

- **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).

In order for any writing to be recognized as scripture it must have been inspired by God. The sixty-six books of the Bible were written over a period of about fifteen hundred years. How those books were selected to be classified as scripture is a very interesting story. There are many books that have been written about how we got the Bible. Now, although many criteria were used to select those sixty-six books, the internal evidence alone is sufficient for me to believe they were inspired by God.

Not only were the scriptures divinely inspired, but Paul said they were useful. Many books have been written that have no usefulness. Most of the books of fiction have no usefulness besides to amuse the readers, and often to deceive them. In contrast, the scriptures are very useful, and Paul listed four specific ways besides making a man wise for salvation. He said they were useful for

instruction  
 reproof  
 correction  
 discipline in righteousness

Instruction provides knowledge and information. Reproof involves criticizing about faults. Correction is the process of fixing that which is in error. And discipline in righteousness concerns training for character development to shun sin and live right. Every scripture is useful for all of those things.

Paul said when they are used that way then the man of God will be qualified, having been completed for every good work. That means men of God must first receive the instruction, the reproof, the correction, and the discipline in righteousness that comes from the words of the Bible before they can become completed for every good work.

Being completed for every good work means becoming ready to be qualified to perform whatever good work may be required. It is like refining ore to obtain purified metals and other minerals so they can be useful. That is the main purpose of a liberal arts education. It prepares a man to wisely apply whatever specialty training he may later receive.

I am convinced that knowledge of the Bible provides a foundation upon which all other knowledge must be based. It trains a man's character so that he will use whatever other knowledge he obtains for righteousness. There is no doubt the nation that uses knowledge of the scriptures as the foundation of its learning will be the most exalted and productive of all other nations. For remember, Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

## Preach the word

- **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).

Solemnly testifying before God and Christ was perhaps the strongest way Paul could urge Timothy. He urged him that way to

preach the word  
 stand ready in season and out of season  
 reprove  
 rebuke  
 exhort  
 do those things with all longsuffering and teaching

Preaching the word of God is the heart of evangelism. Indeed, Paul said it was the way God chose to save those who believe: **“Where is a wise man? Where is a scholar? Where is a researcher of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of this world? 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 1:20-21).

Standing ready in season and out of season means being prepared at all times to promote the good news of Christ. It means to take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim him. It means those things because saving souls is the highest priority for all who belong to Christ. Not all of us can be full time evangelists. But we can all stand ready at all times to take advantage of every opportunity to proclaim him.

To reprove means to express disapproval about what someone is doing. A rebuke is the expression of a strong disapproval. The purpose of both of those things is to correct things wrong about people. Not only must the word of God be preached and promoted to others, but we must also help others correct things that are wrong in their lives. Reproving and rebuking helps people to repent.

To exhort means to urge to do something. And as children of God we should always do things that are good and right and just. None of us can do everything that needs to be done. Therefore, when we exhort we also need to focus on the opportunities available for what needs to be done. We can exhort to live righteously in a general sense, but we also need to exhort about specific things that need to be done.

Paul told Timothy to do those things with all longsuffering and teaching. We need to be patient with people and give them time to consider what we teach them. We need to remember this passage Paul wrote about evangelizing: **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused growth”** (First Corinthians 3:6).

What we teach is the word of God, and we also need to be good examples to every man of applying the word of God to our lives.

## Time they will not tolerate sound doctrine

- **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).

When Paul said there would be time, he was referring to certain times, not one time only. Various times will always come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine. The history in the Bible about the nation of Israel gives many examples of that periodic pattern.

Not only will they be intolerant of sound doctrine, but Paul said they will accumulate teachers to themselves according to their own desires. They will reject every man who attempts to teach sound doctrine, and instead they will choose men who will satisfy their own desires, not the desires of God.

One modern example is the doctrine of salvation. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation requires a man to believe in Christ, repent of his sins, be immersed in water for the remission of them, and live a faithful life of obedience to Christ. However, most people who claim to believe in Christ will not listen to anyone who teaches that doctrine. Instead, they choose for themselves men who teach either the doctrine of salvation by faith only, or the doctrine of believing whatever their priests tell them, which things are what they want to hear.

Such teachers tickle their ears (figuratively) by speaking to them things that please them, amuse them, and make them feel good about themselves. That is the reason why their assemblies are becoming more like theaters than churches. In this generation people go to be entertained.

Another popular myth about the church besides the one about salvation by faith only is the one that says once-saved-always-saved. Other myths are premillennialism, purgatory, and women angels (heavenly agents). None of those things are supported by the Bible.

## Be sober in all things

- **But be thou sober in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, bring thy ministry to fullness** (Second Timothy 4:5).

There is nothing in the Bible that excuses behaving foolishly at any time. The world often encourages and rewards people who act foolishly, but as children of God we are to be sober in all things. Always remember this proverb: **“Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor”** (Ecclesiastes 10:1).

A little light humor is acceptable, but nothing more. A Bible example of light humor might be when Jesus washed the feet of his apostles and Peter protested: **“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”** (John 13:8-9).

Just as Paul told Timothy to endure afflictions, so we too must endure afflictions, those that are unavoidable. We should all seek to alleviate our afflictions and those of others that are unhealthy and harmful. However, as disciples of Christ we are all going to suffer unavoidable afflictions of various kinds. Those we must endure with longsuffering.

Evangelism involves promoting the cause of Christ and his good news of our salvation. Therefore, in one sense we are all evangelists. Paul and Timothy were both full time evangelists. However, most of us can only be part time evangelists whenever we see opportunities present themselves to us.

A mother can be an evangelist to her children. We can be evangelists to our coworkers and our neighbors when they will listen to us. There are even occasions when we can put in a good word for Christ to strangers. However, we must first prepare our minds to be ready for such occasions because they are often fleeting. I still grieve about neglecting excellent occasions when I could have brought glory to him, but I had not prepared my mind. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is a marvelous example of using casual occasions to evangelize his good news (see John 4).

A full ministry in the cause of Christ is doing the work of an evangelist. There are many kinds of work that need to be done in the churches. However, a full ministry is one that includes seeking to add new souls to the kingdom of God.

## Paul was to die soon

- **For I am already poured out a libation, and the time of my dissolution is imminent** (Second Timothy 4:6).

Remember, a libation is the pouring out of sacrificial blood. Using those words Paul is telling Timothy that he was soon going to be put to death for the cause of Christ. And the fact he said he was already poured out a libation indicates the judgment about him had already been made.

What he meant by his dissolution was his death. For when we die our body is dissolved back to the dust from which it was made. Solomon wrote a very poetic description of how that happens, when he said, **“Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shall say, I have no pleasure in them, before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the street, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low, yea, they shall be afraid of height, and terrors shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail, because man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets, before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”** (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7).

When Paul said his dissolution was imminent he meant his death was coming very soon. The Bible gives no information about his death, but tradition says he was beheaded in Rome by command of Nero the head of the Roman government.

## Fought the good fight

- **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith** (Second Timothy 4:7).

Paul spoke of warring the good warfare in his first letter to Timothy, when he said, **“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”** (First Timothy 1:18).

And he described in more detail what kind of warfare our good fight was in this passage to the Corinthians: **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled”** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

Since the dissolution of Paul was imminent he could say that he had fought the good fight, he had finished the course, and he had kept the faith. The history written in the book of Acts describes some of the battles Paul fought for the faith. He was a mighty warrior for Christ and his good news, fighting to promote Christ against the enemies of God.

Paul also spoke of finishing the course. He was using the word course to symbolize our lives here upon the earth. Remember, the Bible often speaks of the way we live as walking on a journey. For example, Jesus spoke about walking the broad versus the restricted way: **“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).

And Paul told us to walk as children of light: **“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”** (Ephesians 5:8-10).

Regarding his keeping the faith, my heart rejoices for great men of God like Paul who kept the faith to the end. And I rejoice above all for Christ our Lord who kept the faith throughout his life, even when he was suffering bitterly because of it. I shudder to think of what I would be like without him. I shudder even more to think of what the world would be like without him.

## Our crown of righteousness

- **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 4:8).

Because Paul had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith he knew that a crown of righteousness would be awarded to him on the day of judgment. He knew the Lord, the righteous judge, would award it to him because that is what God promised us. For Jesus said to the congregation at Smyrna: **“Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10). And Peter said to faithful elders of congregations, **“And when the chief Shepherd is made known, ye will receive the unfading crown of glory”** (First Peter 5:4). And James said, **“Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him”** (James 1:12).

Paul knew the Lord would award the crown of righteousness to him because the Lord is a righteous judge who rewards righteousness. And we too can know he will award the crown of righteousness to us, because Paul said the Lord would award it to all those who have loved his appearing. We can know it just as Paul knew it by trusting the Lord. And the more we learn about him and his holy word, the more we can trust him. Our faith will grow into complete conviction.

Paul said the Lord would award the crown of righteousness to all those who have loved his appearing. He has not appeared to us in the flesh, but he can appear to us in our mind through the story of his life that is recorded in the New Testament. And every man who loves truth and righteousness will love his appearing because Jesus came to give us good

news, the good news of our salvation from the condemnation of our sins, and the hope of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven with him.

### About various men

- **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).

Paul wanted Timothy to come to him. And since the death of Paul was imminent it was imperative that Timothy come to him quickly. The writings of Paul indicate there was no man on earth that he loved more than Timothy. He was like a son to Paul. And I like to think that Paul wanted Timothy to be near him when he died. Paul certainly had the same kind of feelings we have about leaving our loved ones when we die. And we like for them to be near us when it happens.

Paul mentioned five men who had been with him, four of whom had departed. The first man that Paul mentioned was Demas. Paul referred to Demas as a co-workman in his letter to Philemon: **“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes thee, and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my co-workmen”** (Philemon 1:23-24).

However, in this letter to Timothy, Paul said that Demas had forsaken him, having loved the present age. The older I become and the more I learn about this present age, I marvel how any man could love it, even with all its pleasures, treasures, and glories. My knowledge of the word of God has opened my eyes to see the absolute vanity of it.

The wise king Solomon described it well, when he said, **“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 reason why many people love the world is because the devil has deceived them about the truth.

This is the only place in the Bible that mentions Crescens. Hence, we know nothing about him. Paul mentioned Titus often in his writings, referring to him as a partner and co-workman. And one of the letters that Paul wrote that are included in the New Testament, was to Titus.

Luke is believed to be the man who wrote the book of Acts and was a frequent traveling companion with him. He alone was with Paul at that time.

Tychicus is mentioned in the book of Acts as well as in three of Paul’s other letters. Paul referred to him as a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord. Why he sent Tychicus to Ephesus is not told.

Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark with him. Remember, Mark was the man who departed prematurely from Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. And disagreement with Barnabas about taking Mark on the second journey was the reason why Paul and

Barnabas separated. Although Paul refused to take Mark on his second missionary journey, what Paul told Timothy here indicates he still considered Mark to be useful to him for service. Also, he referred to Mark as one of his co-workmen in his letter to Philemon.

## Command to bring things

- **Bring the cloak that I left behind at Troas with Carpus when thou come, and the books, especially the parchments** (Second Timothy 4:13).

This is the only place in the Bible where Carpus is mentioned. Hence, we know nothing about him except what Paul says here. We know not why Paul left the cloak behind with Carpus at Troas, nor do we know why Paul wanted Timothy to bring it. We also do not know what the books and parchments were that Paul asked Timothy to bring. If those things were important for us to know the record would have told us.

Parchments were sheets of leather that were prepared to be used as materials upon which to write. Paul must have wanted Timothy to bring them so that he could do more writing, although it would seem they could have easily have been purchased in Rome. Perhaps it was because parchments were expensive materials, and Timothy already had some available. Paul may have left the books and parchments with Timothy simply for safekeeping.

## His persecution by a coppersmith

- **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** (Second Timothy 4:14-15).

There are several men mentioned in the New Testament with the name Alexander. The first was a son of the man the Romans drafted to carry the cross of Jesus: **“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).

The second is mentioned as of the high priestly family: **“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).

The third was a Christian who tried to defend Paul during the riot at Ephesus: **“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 19:33-34). That riot was fomented by a certain silversmith named Demetrius who was angry because Paul was teaching against idolatry.

The fourth one mentioned was one of the men Paul delivered to Satan: **“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 1:19-20).

Nothing is known about Alexander the coppersmith except what Paul says here in his second letter to Timothy. In fact, this is the only reference ever made of him. Therefore, all we know is that he did many evil things to Paul, extremely opposing their words (those of Paul and his co-workmen). Paul warned Timothy to beware of him. Alexander was probably a bitter enemy to him because, like Demetrius, Paul was teaching against idolatry. And we too need to beware of those who are bitter enemies of the truth.

Paul called upon the Lord to repay Alexander according to his works. The Lord will repay every man according to his works, unless he allows Jesus to redeem him. Remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees who were opposing him: **“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 Lord rescued Paul

- **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** (Second Timothy 4:16-17).

We know not what happened to Paul on that occasion, nor do we know when and where they happened. All we know is that many evil things were done to him by Alexander the coppersmith. We know nothing about the men who forsook Paul at his first defense. We do not even know what that defense was about, nor how many other times he was required to defend himself. However, none of those details are important for us to know.

Paul said the Lord stood by him and strengthened him so that through him the sacred message might be brought to fullness, and all the Gentiles might hear. That information suggests the persecution by Alexander the coppersmith happened earlier in the ministry of Paul. The Lord rescued him so that he could continue his apostleship to the Gentiles, and bring the message of the good news of Christ to all of them. That way the sacred message would be brought to fullness, meaning it would be preached both to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Although Paul said that no man came to his first defense, he did not want that to be reckoned to them. Paul must have been in great danger, because he said he was rescued out of the mouth of the lion. Being in the mouth of a lion symbolized being in a very dangerous, life threatening, and terrifying experience. And during such times of great danger it is natural for men to scatter and flee for their lives. That was probably why they all forsook Paul, and he understood it. Therefore, he did not want it to be reckoned to them. Remember, the apostles all fled when Jesus was arrested, but he forgave them.

## Being saved for the heavenly kingdom

- **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 4:16-18).

The Lord will not rescue us from every evil against our lives here upon the earth. But he does rescue us from every evil work against our eternal spirit. And he will save us for his heavenly kingdom where we will be sons of God for eternity. Paul suffered from many evil things in his life, and we too suffer from many evil things. For the Bible says we must all suffer that way.

Remember this passage about Paul and Barnabas: **“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).

Paul knew that the time of his dissolution was imminent, yet he still praised God. Sinners rail against God when they suffer from evils. But as children of God we must always praise him even during times when we suffer. We must praise him because he deserves our praise. We must praise him because he will save us for his heavenly kingdom—if like Paul we continue to fight the good fight and keep the faith until the end.

## Closing instructions

- **Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the house of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left being sick at Miletus. Hurry to come before winter. Eubulus salutes thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brothers** (Second Timothy 4:19-21).

That is the second time Paul urged Timothy to come to him quickly. Perhaps he needed the cloak he asked Timothy to bring for warmth during the coming winter. Perhaps also Timothy would be coming by sea, and travel that way was more dangerous in the winter. Remember this passage: **“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). The Fast refers to the day of atonement, which was commanded in the law of Moses. It came during the fall of the year.

Prisca and Aquila were Jewish Christians who were active with Paul many times. You can read more about them in my comments about Acts 18:1-3. For some reason they and the house of Onesiphorus are the only ones in that list of people that Paul asked Timothy to salute.

Remember, Paul mentioned the house of Onesiphorus in the first part of this letter: **“May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain”** (Second Timothy 1:16).

Erastus is mentioned in two other passages of the New Testament. One in the book of Acts: **“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 the other is in the book of Romans: **“Erastus, the manager of the city, salutes you, and Quartus the brother”** (Romans 16:23).

Trophimus is also mentioned in two other passages, both of which are in the book of Acts: **“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), and, **“For they were men who saw Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they supposed that Paul brought into the temple”** (Acts 21:29).

Notice how Paul said that he left Trophimus being sick at Miletus. If Paul had the power to heal at will he certainly would not have left Trophimus sick. God gave Peter, Paul, and some other men the power to heal for one purpose: to provide proof that they had been sent by God. And that is how and why he used that power. Miletus was about forty miles south of Ephesus. Modern faith healers are liars, claiming the power to heal at will. No man has any supernatural powers now. All supernatural healings ended with the writing of the New Testament. Let them not deceive you.

The men Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia are only mention here in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Hence, we know nothing about them, except they were faithful Christians there with Paul.

## Conferring a blessing

- **The Lord Jesus Christ is with thy spirit. Grace is with you. Truly** (Second Timothy 4:22).

Paul concluded this letter to Timothy with those words of encouragement, telling him that the Lord Jesus Christ was with his spirit, and that grace was with all of them (thy is singular and you is plural in the old English, which words I use in my translation). The Lord and his grace is with the spirit of every faithful disciple. He is always near us, although invisible to our fleshly eyes. Indeed, Paul said that the Spirit of Christ was even in us: **“Examine yourselves whether ye are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or know ye not yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”** (Second Corinthians 13:5).

## A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to Titus

### Paul describes his work and gives a greeting

- **Paul, a bondman of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of the chosen of God, and the knowledge of truth according to piety, in hope of eternal life, which the non-lying God promised before times eternal, but in his own times he made known his word by preaching, which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, to Titus, a genuine child according to the common faith: Grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 1:1-4).**

Paul said he was a bondman of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to (1) the faith of the chosen of God, and (2) the knowledge of truth according to piety. First I will explain how Paul served God and Christ according to the faith of the chosen.

The chosen of God are all those who believe and obey him. We are all born sons of God, but we lose our sonship when we first sin. However, he will adopt us to become his sons again through our faith in his Son Jesus Christ. As Paul said, **“For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:26). That is what makes us the chosen of God. We are chosen by God out of the population of the lost souls of the world through our faith in Christ.

The expression “the faith” is used forty-three times in the Bible. All of which are in the New Testament, and all of which were used after the ascension of Christ and the establishment of his church. That expression refers to our faith in Christ and his good news of our salvation.

It is *the* faith because it is the supreme faith. No other faith can give us eternal salvation, which is why Jude urged us, the sanctified in God, to contend for it: **“Beloved, making all diligence to write to you about the common salvation, I had need to write to you exhorting you to earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the sanctified”** (Jude 1:3). Paul said he was a bondman of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to that faith. It was because of that faith and for that faith that he was a bondman of God and an apostle of Christ.

Paul also said he served God and Christ according to the knowledge of truth according to piety. Just as the good news of Christ is called the faith, so also it is called truth. For example, the psalmist said about Jehovah, **“The sum of thy word is truth ...”** (Psalm 119:160). And during his prayer at the last supper, Jesus said about his apostles, **“Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is truth”** (John 17:17).

The word of God, including the good news of Christ, is called truth. Paul had knowledge of it, which was given to him directly by Christ. As he said to the disciples at Galatia, **“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).

That knowledge was according to piety. Remember, piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness. Therefore, the knowledge of truth according to piety means knowledge of the word of God that is committed to and devoted to righteousness. A man can have knowledge of the word of God, but use it wrongfully to promote evil. Remember, Satan quoted scriptures when he tempted Jesus to sin in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:5-10).

Paul also said he was serving God and Christ in hope of eternal life. Every child of God who serves him and his Son Jesus has hope of eternal life. For Paul said to the brothers in Rome, **“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”** (Romans 6:22).

Our hope of eternal life was promised by the non-lying God even before times eternal. That means even before anything was made God committed himself to give eternal life to every man who would have faith in him. Indeed, that was the reason for the creation of this world: to give us the opportunity to become his sons for eternity.

And in his own time and way he revealed himself and his holy word to the world by the humble method of preaching. As Paul said to the congregation at Corinth, **“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).

And God entrusted that humble method of our salvation to humble men like Paul. God entrusted it to him according to his commandment. That means God commanded Paul to preach his word. Jesus gave that command to him when Paul asked who it was that appeared to him in his vision: **“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 26:16-18).

Paul spoke of the Lord as being the non-lying God. That means his word is always trustworthy and true. It does not mean that God has never concealed the truth from anyone. Remember this passage: **“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”** (John 12:39-40).

Neither does it mean that God never misleads anyone. Indeed, the Bible record tells how God once sent a lying spirit against the wicked king Ahab. Here is that story: **“And Micahiah [the prophet] said, Therefore hear thou the word of Jehovah. I saw Jehovah sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And Jehovah said, Who shall entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.**

**“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before Jehovah, and said, I will entice him. And Jehovah said to him, With what? And he said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shall entice him, and shall also prevail. Go forth, and do so.**

**“Now therefore, behold, Jehovah has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and Jehovah has spoken evil concerning thee”** (First Kings 22:19-23).

It is exceedingly naïve and dangerous to have the attitude it is always wrong not to tell the truth. Would you tell a mad man where to find someone he was trying to kill? Would you deceive him if it would save the lives of innocent souls? I certainly would, and I know that God would approve. You can read the example in Exodus (1:15-21) of the midwives who lied in order to save innocent lives, and the Lord blessed them. Nevertheless, beware of lying. It is like killing someone, which is only justified in rare circumstances.

The Lord is a non-lying God, which means his word is always trustworthy and true. Nevertheless, he can do anything he desires. But whatever he does it is always good, right, and just, even when he sends a lying spirit against someone to deceive him.

Paul wrote this letter to Titus. Like Timothy, Titus was a beloved brother and fellow workman with Paul. He is often mentioned in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Paul called him a genuine child according to the common faith. The common faith is the same as “the faith.” Paul called it common because it is shared by all of us. Denominationalism is clearly a violation of the will of Christ that our faith be common, for it promotes the idea of tolerating different faiths.

Titus was a genuine child because every faithful disciple of Christ is a child of God. And Paul knew that Titus was genuine because he had proven himself many times. Therefore, Paul called for grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ our Savior to be with Titus. Grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ will be with all who are genuine children of the common faith.

Notice how Paul made a clear distinction between God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. They are two distinct persons. The theory of the trinity is a false one. They are one person only in the sense that a man and his wife are one flesh (see Genesis 2:24), united in spirit not in personhood. The idea of a triune God is as ridiculous as a duo man.

## The qualifications of elders

- **I left thee behind in Crete on account of this: That thou should set in order the things lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded thee, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having believing children, not with an accusation of debauchery or insubordinate.**
- **For the overseer must be blameless as a steward of God, not self-willed, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not a fighter, not greedy of base gain, but a lover of strangers, a lover of good, serious minded, just, devout, self-controlled, holding firm the faithful word according to the teaching, so that he may also be able to exhort by the sound doctrine, and to correct those who contradict** (Titus 1:5-9).

Many claim that Titus was a Bishop. Remember however, there is no office of Bishop that was every authorized or even mentioned in the Bible. Actually, the Bible says nothing about Titus holding any kind of office. Paul only called him his partner and co-workman (see Second Corinthians 8:23).

Crete is a large island south of Greece. Crete is only mentioned elsewhere in the book of Acts when it describes Paul's voyage to Rome as a prisoner on his way to appeal Caesar. However, Cretans are mentioned as being present among the many other foreign pilgrims in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the church was first established (see Acts 2).

Paul reminded Titus of his command for him to (1) set in order the things lacking, and (2) appoint elders in every city. Setting in order things lacking apparently refers to the affairs of the congregations, how they were to properly conduct themselves.

Regarding the authority to appoint elders, the Bible gives no details about how and to whom that authority is given. However, there are obvious things required of such men. For example, they must be Christians; they must be very knowledgeable about the word of God; and they must be mature and well established in the church.

Being under the law of liberty, God has given us much freedom about who we should choose to appoint elders, as long as it is done according to the principles of righteousness.

Regarding the qualifications of elders, Paul said that every candidate must be

- blameless
- the husband of one wife
- having believing children, not with an accusation of debauchery or insubordinate
- not self-willed
- not prone to anger
- not a drunkard
- not a fighter
- not greedy of base gain
- a lover of strangers
- a lover of good
- serious minded
- just
- devout
- self-controlled

The ones Paul gave to Timothy (see First Timothy 3:1-7) that are not in the above list are these:

- sober
- disciplined
- able to teach
- gentle
- noncontentious
- no lover of money
- a man who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all propriety
- not a new convert
- having a good testimony from those outside

The ones Paul gave to Titus that are not in the one he gave to Timothy are these:

- not self-willed
- not prone to anger
- a lover of good

just

devout

self-controlled

having believing children, not with an accusation of debauchery or insubordinate

However, being disciplined is the same thing as being self-controlled. And although the wording about the children of elders is different, both mean virtually the same thing. Hence, there are twelve differences in the two lists. Namely,

sober (First Timothy)

able to teach (First Timothy)

gentle (First Timothy)

noncontentious (First Timothy)

no lover of money (First Timothy)

not a new convert (First Timothy)

having a good testimony from those outside (First Timothy)

not self-willed (Titus)

not prone to anger (Titus)

a lover of good (Titus)

just (Titus)

devout (Titus)

From those differences we can see how such lists were not intended to be all-inclusive, depending upon various other circumstances which do not apply to every case. For there are many other characteristics of men that should be considered that are not in either of those lists, things that are both good and bad about men. For example, a man should not be considered qualified if he is in the military service that requires him to be away for extended periods of time. Otherwise, how could he be an effective overseer.

We are under the law of liberty with God, and must use our own good judgment about how best to do things, including the selection of overseers. Of course, that does not mean we can ignore the lists that Paul gave. Those qualities that are listed should be binding. They are wonderful samples of the kinds of things that should be considered. But we must not be legalistic about such things. Other things should sometimes be considered, depending upon the various circumstances involved.

Regarding the qualifications that Paul gave to Titus, no disciple of Christ should be self-willed. Even Jesus said about himself, **“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).

The ability to teach varies widely among people, from having little to having much. An elder should have at least a competent ability to teach. That ability, however, does not necessarily mean the ability to teach by public speaking. Some men can teach well privately, but poorly to groups.

Notice the qualification about anger did not say to have no anger. It says not prone to anger. There is no sin in becoming angry. But it is foolish to be prone to anger, which means being disposed to anger—being easily provoked to anger, and being quick to anger.

Every disciple of Christ should be a lover of good, should be just, and should be devout. But elders should be outstanding in those virtues. No man should have reason to doubt their love of good, their justice, and their devotion to Christ and his good news.

## Insubordinate men must be muzzled

- **For there are also many insubordinate men, vain talkers and deceivers, especially those from circumcision, who must be muzzled, men who subvert whole houses, teaching things that they ought not, for sake of ugly profit (Titus 1:10-11).**

After giving his list of the qualifications of elders, Paul said there were also many insubordinate men. Insubordinate men are those who are disobedient to authority. The ones Paul said needed to be muzzled were the vain talkers and deceivers.

Vain talk involves saying things that are empty and useless. It includes the babblings that Paul condemned in both of his letters to Timothy (see 1Ti 5:13, 6:20 and 2Ti 2:16). Deceit leads people astray. Vain talk and deceit are both dangerous and destructive.

Men can be insubordinate without being vain talkers and deceivers. But all men who are vain talkers and deceivers are insubordinate. They are insubordinate because such talk is against the will of God, being dangerous and destructive.

Hence, insubordinate men who speak that way must be muzzled. Language is to our mind as food to our body. Some of it makes people healthy and strong, but some of it is like poison. And people need to be protected from poison to stay alive and healthy. Therefore, insubordinate men who are vain talkers and deceivers must be muzzled. This adulterous generation of Americans has forgotten that, and they demand free speech for everybody about everything. Hence, their souls are becoming unhealthy and dying.

Paul gave the example of such men subverting whole houses, teaching things they ought not. To subvert means to corrupt, overthrow, and destroy. And what Paul meant by whole houses was not the structures people live in, but the families that inhabit them. The vain talk and deceit of those insubordinate men were corrupting and destroying whole families. That means the faith and the behavior of those families were being corrupted and destroyed. It might also mean the unity of the families was being subverted.

Those insubordinate men were teaching things they ought not in order to gain ugly profit. There is good profit and bad profit; there is lovely profit that is a result of the labor of righteousness, and there is ugly profit that is the result of subverting people. Those insubordinate men had no love for people; their only love was for ugly profit, pure selfishness.

Paul did not say what were those things they were teaching. But that is irrelevant for us, because there is an almost unlimited number of things that men can and have taught that subvert houses by corrupting people. Paul did say those insubordinate men were especially from the circumcision. He was referring to the Jews who were opposing Christ and his good news of our salvation.

Remember this passage: **“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. 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 13:43-45).**

## The Cretans

- **A certain man of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies (Titus 1:12-13).**

We have no record that Paul ever evangelized in Crete. It is only mentioned as a temporary way-point on his voyage to Rome as a prisoner (see Acts 27). Nevertheless, there were congregations there, because Paul commanded Titus to appoint elders in every city. And Paul told him that was the reason he left him behind in Crete. When that happened is not known. It could not have happened when Paul was being taken to Rome, because Paul later said to Titus, “... **be diligent to come to me in Nicopolis, for I have decided to winter there”** (Titus 3:12-13). And there is no Biblical evidence that Paul was ever released from his bondage at Rome.

What Paul said about the Cretans were very strong words of condemnation about their national character. Nevertheless remember, he did not originate those words. They came from a certain man of themselves, a prophet of their own. That makes the criticism even more severe, because it came from a prophet of their own.

Being always liars does not mean everything they uttered was a lie. It means they were completely untrustworthy in whatever they said. A man could never tell whether what they said was true or not.

Being evil beasts meant they acted like animals and not men, animals of the worse kind, evil beasts. Not all beasts are evil. Sheep and doves are not evil. Wolves and lions are evil because they attack and kill men when they have the opportunities. The Cretans were evil beasts, which made them very dangerous. Since America forsook God and became pagan, there are places in the country now that are filled with men who are evil beasts. Some of those places are so dangerous that even the police fear to go there alone.

Being lazy bellies means they were lazy men who lived only to indulge the lusts of their flesh. Such men in America are gluttons and fornicators, drunkards and drug addicts. They are unfit for employment, and only survive from the gains of crime and from the welfare payments from our socialist government.

Now although the national character of the Cretans was that of always liars, evil beasts, and lazy bellies, there were some of them who were of a noble character. Otherwise Paul would not have commanded Titus to appoint elders in every city. For remember, the qualifications of elders required men to be noble and righteous. And there was obviously a minority of Cretans who were of that character.

## Reprove them harshly

- **This testimony is true, because of which reason, reprove them harshly, so that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish myths, and commandments of men who turn away from the truth (Titus 1:13-14).**

Paul no doubt meant to rebuke the citizens of Crete whom they were evangelizing, and not those who had already become disciples of Christ. Remember this passage about John the immerser: **“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. 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 3:4-8).

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the ones that John reproved harshly. They needed to be reproved harshly because they were hypocrites. Jesus uttered many woes against those men, including the scholars and the lawyers, because of their evil deeds and their hypocrisy (see for example Matthew 23).

Paul said to reprove the Cretans harshly so they will be sound in the faith. If there was any hope for them, harsh reproof would arouse them to repent of their sinful ways, and that would be the only way they could be sound in the faith. Reproving harshly is no guarantee that all such men will repent. However, it will be more effective in shocking some of them into repenting.

Paul mentioned how being sound in the faith included rejecting Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. Few Christians are aware of the massive number of rules and regulations the Jews have accumulated for themselves over the centuries. Nor are they aware of the large number of myths and legends that have grown in their traditions.

Men are constantly inventing fanciful stories to lead people astray. In modern times they have used the motion picture business that way. Their cleverly crafted stories contain many seductive ideas intended to manipulate the thinking of people. They teach their beliefs and values by stealth, using their stories to make their ways and their values seem superior.

A more direct way to manipulate people is to create many commandments for them. Every commandment restricts freedom to some degree. The good news of Christ has few commandments, which is why it is called the law of liberty. That law of liberty works only when men love truth and righteousness. Sinful people need many laws and commandments. Turning away from the truth always results in increased laws and commandments by their rulers. They increase because they are needed to control sinful people who will not control themselves. That is why government bureaucracies have grown so large and numerous since America became pagan.

### The pure versus the defiled and unbelieving

- **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).

The words “all things” in that passage cannot be taken literally. Otherwise Christ himself could not be considered pure, because he spoke about many impure things. To the pure all things are pure simply means that people whose hearts are clean and wholesome tend to see other people as having hearts that are clean and wholesome—unless revealed otherwise. Therefore, the pure must also develop wisdom so they can see who is not pure, those who are defiled and do not believe in truth and righteousness.

In contrast to the pure, Paul said that to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. To them nothing is pure because both their mind and their consciences are defiled. They have taken the pure spirit that God gave them when they were born, and corrupted it into an evil spirit. Their mind is defiled so that they cannot see anything pure.

Paul said they were abominable and disobedient. He described them in more detail in his second letter to Timothy, when he said they were **“lovers of self, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, impious, devoid of natural affection, irreconcilable, slanderous, without self-control, savage, no lovers of good, traitors, reckless, beclouded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ...”** (Second Timothy 3:2-4).

Thus, they are worthless for every good work. What Paul meant by every good work was any kind of good work. Such men are worthless for any kind of good work. Indeed, they are worse than worthless. They are dangerous and destructive. The law of Moses told how to manage such men. You can read an analysis of those laws in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Paul also said their consciences were defiled. That means they are useless as guides for doing right. On the contrary, they excuse and justify their unrighteousness. Their defiled conscience makes them think the evil things they do are good for them. And as Solomon said, they cannot sleep unless they do it: **“Enter not into the path of the wicked, and walk not in the way of evil men. Avoid it. Do not pass by it. Turn from it, and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they do evil. And their sleep is taken away unless they cause to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence”** (Proverbs 4:14-17).

Regarding God, such men can profess to know him, but in their works they deny him. The scholars and the Pharisees claimed to know God, but their works denied him. That is why Jesus said 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. In this way also, ye indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside ye are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”** (Matthew 23:27-28).

He also said to them at another time, **“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 8:54-55). Those Jews who were opposing Jesus claimed they knew God, but Jesus said they did not know him. They certainly knew some things about him, but they knew nothing about the true nature of his Spirit and character. For by their evil works they denied him.

Consider what the psalmist wrote about such men: **“But to the wicked man God says, What have thou to do to declare my statutes, and that thou have taken my covenant in thy mouth, since thou hate instruction, and cast my words behind thee? When thou saw a thief, thou consented with him, and have been partaker with adulterers. Thou give thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frames deceit. Thou sit and speak against thy brother; thou slander thine own mother’s son.**

**“These things thou have done, and I kept silence. Thou thought that I was altogether such a one as thyself. But I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes”** (Psalm 50:16-21).

Notice how God said about them, **“Thou thought that I was altogether such a one as thyself.”** They thought they knew God, but their thinking about him was perverted. They knew him not.

## Speak things that are fitting

- **But speak thou the things that are fitting for the sound doctrine** (Titus 2:1).

In contrast to the vain talkers and deceivers that Paul condemned because they produce evil, Titus was to speak the things that were fitting for the sound doctrine. The Bible is filled with knowledge about what are the things that are fitting for the sound doctrine.

Sound doctrine includes loving each other. Here is a commandment that Jesus gave to his apostles about that at the last supper before his betrayal and crucifixion: **“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).

Sound doctrine includes believing in Christ and being immersed for salvation. For example, here is a commandment Jesus gave to his apostles after his resurrection: **“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). That means being immersed in water for the remission of sins.

Here is a description from the apostle John about how to discriminate between the children of God and the children of the devil: **“By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother. Because this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love each other”** (First John 3:10-11).

Sound doctrine includes doing righteousness. Here is an example of the things of righteousness that are listed in the book of 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. And those of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and the lusts”** (Galatians 5:22-24).

And there are many other things about what is sound doctrine that are taught in the word of God, the Bible. Paul gives a few more of them in the remaining part of this letter.

## Aged men

- **Aged men are to be sober, noble, serious minded, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance** (Titus 2:2).

Solomon said, “**The glory of young men is their strength, and the beauty of old men is the hoary head**” (Proverbs 20:29). The hoary head symbolizes knowledge and wisdom. As men age their physical strength declines, but they also gain more knowledge and wisdom, unless they are spiritual degenerates. Therefore, aged men should be

sober  
noble  
serious minded  
sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

All men of God should be sober, noble, serious minded, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance, but the aged men should be renown for those things. They should lead in those things, and be examples of them. That is why the leaders of the congregations are called elders.

## Aged women

- **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).

Paul said that aged women were to be

reverent in behavior  
not slanderous  
not enslaved to much wine  
teachers of what is good

Paul mentioned two things they should do, and two things they should not do. They were not to be slanderous, nor were they to be enslaved to much wine. Gossip seems to be more of a temptation of older women than of older men. And slander is the more vicious part of gossip.

Being enslaved to much wine is another expression for being a drunkard. One study I read on the internet (See <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k7/AlcGender/AlcGender.cfm>) said that men were twice as likely to become alcoholics (a modern euphemism for drunkards). Therefore, drunkenness is even more disgusting for aged women.

The aged women were to be reverent in their behavior and teachers of what is good. Being reverent involves being humble and respectful. And they should not only be that way toward God, but also toward their husbands. They should be teachers of what is good so that they might admonish the young women to

be sensible  
love their husbands

love their children  
 be serious-minded  
 be pure  
 be homemakers  
 do good  
 be submissive to their own husbands

Besides admonishing the young women to be being sensible, serious minded, pure, and good, they were

to love their husbands and submit to them  
 love their children  
 be homemakers.

God's role for women is to be helpmates for their husbands, and to be mothers bringing new souls into the world and rear them for righteousness.

Modern women have forsaken that role in rebellion to God. Therefore, it is even more important for the elder women to admonish the younger women in those things, and not join the sinful women of the world.

Paul said the young women should be submissive to their own husbands (not other women's husbands), so that the word of God may not be blasphemed. In more normal and sensible times women are expected to be submissive to their own husbands. And if Christian women are not, then the word of God would be blasphemed. It would be blamed and condemned for causing the women not to be submissive, if the Christian wives were not themselves submissive.

However, in this adulterous and sinful generation it is considered right for wives not to be submissive to their husbands. Independent wives who rebel against submission to their husbands are championed as courageous heroes. Our evil rulers have even outlawed the authority of husbands over their wives, making them criminals when they try to assert their God-given authority.

Although Paul did not say anything in this book about how husbands were to treat their wives, he did say to the congregation of the Ephesians, **“Husbands, love your own wives even as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it, so that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the word, so that he might present it to himself, the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and unblemished.**

**“So ought the husbands to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as also Christ the church, because we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:25-30).

## Younger men

- **Likewise exhort the younger men to be sober-minded** (Titus 2:6).

Not to be forgotten are the younger men. Paul said to exhort them to be sober-minded. Young men are more liable to live recklessly and foolishly. Therefore, they need to be

exhorted to be sober-minded, and not be led astray by the foolishness and recklessness of the young men of the world.

## Present thyself a pattern of good works

- **Concerning all things presenting thyself a pattern of good works in the doctrine: integrity, dignity, incorruptibility, sound speech, irreproachable, so that the man of opposition may be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us** (Titus 2:8).

When Paul told Titus to present himself a pattern of good works, he was telling him to be a model of excellence in living the ways of the good news of Christ that others could imitate. And he said Titus should act that way in all things. And we too should strive in all things to show ourselves a pattern of good works in the doctrine of Christ. That doctrine includes all the ways of truth and righteousness. And Paul listed five examples:

integrity  
 dignity  
 incorruptibility  
 sound speech  
 irreproachable

Having integrity means being sound, wholesome, and upright in your life. It is the opposite of being crooked and corrupt. Having dignity means being serious, poised, and worthy of respect. It is the opposite of being foolish, frivolous, and immature.

Having incorruptibility means being unable to be corrupted. It means being invulnerable to the temptations of sin. No man has that completely, but we must continually strive for it.

Sound speech involves saying things that are true and trustworthy. Speech is the primary way we communicate with each other, sharing thoughts, ideas, and information. Unsound speech is like having defective eyes and ears. They lead astray into harm and failure. Deceit and treachery are the opposite of sound speech.

Being irreproachable means nobody can justly find fault to criticize, blame, and condemn. That way whatever man opposes us will be ashamed because he has nothing bad to say about us. It can be embarrassing and humiliating to a man when he is against us, because when he is required to justify his opposition he cannot find anything bad to accuse us.

Peter spoke of that when he encouraged us to **“always be ready for a defense to every man who asks you a word about the hope in you, with meekness and fear. Having a good conscience, so that, in what they speak against you as of evildoers, they may be ashamed, those who revile your good behavior in Christ”** (First Peter 3:15-16).

Jesus was irreproachable, but he was still opposed and slandered by the rulers of the Jews. However, when they brought him before the Roman governor Pilate, they were embarrassed because their accusations were exposed as empty and unfounded. For the record says Pilate **“knew that they delivered him up because of envy”** (Matthew 27:18). The rulers exposed their own guilt when they accused Jesus.

And in the day of judgment every man of opposition to us who believe in Christ will be put to shame before all because they will have nothing bad to say about us. The truth about everything will be revealed in that great day.

## Bondmen obey your own masters

- **Bondmen are to be obedient to their own masters, to be well-pleasing in all things, not speaking contrary, not pilfering, but demonstrating all good fidelity, so that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things** (Titus 2:9-10).

Bondmen refer to any kind of employee, whether in bondage, or under a contract, or simply hired for work. Paul said bondmen (employees) were to

be obedient to their masters (employers)  
 be well-pleasing in all things to them  
 not speak contrary  
 not pilfer  
 demonstrate all good fidelity

It is right and just for us to obey those who employ us, unless they command us to do things that are wrong. It is right for us to be well-pleasing in all things to them. Not only should our labor be the best we can, but we should have a pleasing attitude and a good hearted spirit as we labor.

We should not speak contrary to them, nor argue with them, unless it is for their welfare, and you can convince them of it. Neither should we ever pilfer. To pilfer is a temptation that virtually all employees experience. It is easy for an employee to justify pilfering to himself. However, it is never justified. It is better to get permission, even for taking things that seem insignificant.

My father worked for a commercial airline. And he told me that originally the company would allow their workers to salvage things for themselves from whatever was rejected and cast away. However, they had to stop allowing that because too many of the employees began to pilfer. That was just another example of how the innocent lose benefits because of the sins of the guilty—in this sinful world.

Every one of us should demonstrate all good fidelity, not just employees. Fidelity is faithful devotion and loyalty. Husbands and wives must demonstrate all good fidelity to each other. Fellow Christians must demonstrate all good fidelity to each other. And employees should demonstrate all good fidelity to their employers. That is expected of them, and when it is not done it is a betrayal.

Paul said they were to do all those things so that they might adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. God is our Savior, and his doctrine includes all the ways of righteousness. To adorn means to make more attractive and beautiful by adding on pleasant things. Therefore, by acting in those righteous ways to our employers we make ourselves more attractive to them. And that will bring glory to God and Christ.

## Deny sinful things and live right

- **For the saving grace of God has appeared to all men, disciplining us, so that, having denied irreverence and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and piously in the present age** (Titus 2:11-12).

Jesus Christ is the saving grace of God. For it is only through him that we can be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. And that redemption is given to us freely by grace, because we cannot earn it. We receive it by believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, being immersed in water for the remission of them, and living in faithful obedience to Christ forever.

Paul said that Christ has appeared to all men. He has not appeared to all men physically, but he can be seen through the words of his good news that have been recorded for us in the Bible. His heavenly form is described briefly in the book of Revelation (see Rev 1:13-16). But his spirit can be seen in the entire New Testament, especially in the four biographies of him: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Paul said that Jesus has appeared to all men, disciplining us. Discipline is training in self-control and righteousness. And that is absolutely necessary for our salvation. It is absolutely necessary so that we can repent of our sins and obey Christ.

Being disciplined enables us to deny irreverence and worldly lusts. Without discipline a man becomes a slave of his fleshly impulses and lusts. No man will ever enter heaven and see God who is undisciplined. He will join the wild evil spirits in the lake of fire called hell.

Our eternal salvation requires that we deny irreverence and worldly lusts, and act like children of God. That means to live soberly and righteously and piously in the present age. This present age is an evil one, dominated by the devil and his followers. As children of God we must contrast with them and live soberly and righteously and piously. We must be shining lights for this dark world of sin, just as Jesus was the great shining light for us. God has called us for that.

## Await the blessed hope of Christ

- **Awaiting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a special people, a zealot of good works** (Titus 2:13-14).

The blessed hope is for us to become sons of God for eternity in the new Jerusalem of heaven with him. And when Jesus appears in his glory at the end of the world, then our hope will be fulfilled. For Jesus said, **“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will, no, not go out any more. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem (it comes down out of the heaven from my God), and my new name”** (Revelation 3:12).

Jesus is our great God and Savior. He is the only begotten Son of God the Father. And he came down to the earth to live as a man to become our Redeemer. As Paul said, he gave himself for us. He left his glory in heaven, put on a body of flesh as we do, lived as a poor

man doing good, and sacrificed himself, suffering and dying upon the cross, so that he might redeem us from all lawlessness. Remember however, our redemption can only come when we believe and obey him. And that means forsaking all sin and lawlessness.

By redeeming us—those who believe and obey him—he purified to himself a special people. He purified us by redeeming us from our past sins. And we remain purified by forsaking all sin and lawlessness. That way we are separated from the world, and become his special people. As 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).

And that also means we become a zealot of good works. A zealot is a man who is extremely devoted to a cause. And as children of God we must be extremely devoted to good works. Good works are the products of righteousness of every kind, because there are many ways to perform good works.

A preacher performs good works when he proclaims Christ and his good news faithfully and truly. A common laborer performs good works when he does his job faithfully and industriously. A humble mother performs good works when she rears her children in faith and righteousness. And we all perform good works when we serve as witnesses to the world of the superiority of Christ and his good news of our salvation. There is no end to different kinds of good works that can be done.

As the special people of Christ we must be zealots of good works. We must be known as an industrious and productive people, productive of works of righteousness.

## Speak, exhort, rebuke with every command

- **These things speak and exhort and rebuke with every command. Let no man disparage thee** (Titus 2:15).

What Paul told Titus to do is what every evangelist must do. With every command of God a faithful evangelist must speak and exhort and rebuke. He must speak every command of God, and not neglect or disregard any of them. And that means he must first become skilled in his knowledge of the commands of God. He must know which commands are obsolete and which are still in effect. And he must become skilled in explaining the meanings and applications of every command.

With every command he must also exhort and rebuke. To exhort means to urge earnestly. An evangelist must earnestly urge obedience to every command. Our obedience to the commands of Christ is not optional. The doctrine of salvation by faith only is a false and evil one. Although our obedience to every command does not earn our salvation, it is absolutely necessary. Be not led astray by the many false teachers in the world who claim to preach Christ, but belittle his commands and promote their own.

With every command an evangelist must also rebuke. To rebuke is to scold and reprimand. Rebukes are necessary against sin. The first thing Jesus preached when he began his ministry was that men repent of their sins. And a faithful evangelist must also preach repentance, rebuking every sin.

Paul told Titus to let no man disparage him. We are to turn away from men who refuse us, shaking the dust from our feet (see Matthew 10:14). However, we must not allow them to disparage us. To disparage means to belittle and make light of. We should act meekly but speak the good news of Christ boldly. We should make very clear, in no uncertain terms, that those who reject us do not reject us but Almighty God who sent us through Christ.

They may reject the message of Christ, but we should never give them cause to belittle and make light of us who proclaim it. The Jews rejected Christ and his teachings, but they were unable to successfully disparage him. They could not convincingly disparage him because of the power of his good works.

Remember this passage: **“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). And the best way to keep men from disparaging us convincingly is with the power of our good works, even though we cannot perform miracles.

## Ways to live right

- **Remind them to be submissive to principle offices and positions of authority, to be obedient, to be prepared for every good work, to slander no man, to be noncontentious, gentle, showing all meekness to all men** (Titus 3:1-2).

That is another list of acts of righteousness that we should all perform. Paul said we should

be submissive to principle offices and positions of authority  
 be obedient  
 be prepared for every good work  
 slander no man  
 be noncontentious  
 be gentle, showing all meekness to all men

Submitting to principle offices and positions of authority means to be good law abiding citizens. The only time we can disobey them is when they command us to disobey God. For example, the apostles disobeyed the rulers of the Jews when they commanded them to cease preaching Christ and his good news of our salvation.

Being obedient refers to obeying whoever has authority over us, whether they be our rulers, or employers, or our parents as children. Being prepared for every good work means learning and developing skills. Of course, not literally for every good work, but for whatever good work we can prepare for.

Slander is to make false accusations against someone. The word devil literally means slanderer. He is called that because he continually accuses the righteous. Remember this passage: **“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). He can no longer justly accuse us before God, but in the world he still accuses us to men through those who serve him.

Being contentious means being quarrelsome, which is something none of us should ever be. We must be non-contentious and not be easily provoked into an argument or a conflict. That does not mean we should be pacifists and never engage in a conflict. It means we should avoid them when we can. We should be peacemakers, because Jesus said, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God”** (Matthew 5:9).

We should be gentle souls, showing meekness to all men. The Lord said about the meek: **“Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). And he said about himself, **“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). But remember, meekness is not cowardice.

## Our former evils

- **For we also were formerly foolish, disobedient, being led astray, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in evil and envy, hateful, hating each other** (Titus 3:3).

Paul named seven things about our former lives before we believed and obeyed Christ. He said we were

foolish  
 disobedient  
 being led astray  
 serving various lusts and pleasures  
 living in evil and envy  
 hateful  
 hating each other

That list of evils is certainly an unpleasant description. Yet Paul said we were all that way, and he included himself. Now he does not mean that list describes our former character. He means we have all been that way and done some of those things *at some time* in our past lives.

Before we became disciples of Christ we were not always foolish, not always disobedient, not always led astray, not always serving various lusts and pleasures, not always living in evil and envy, not always being hateful, not always hating each other.

Yet there were times, particularly as children, when we were foolish, were disobedient, were led astray, served various lusts and pleasures, lived in evil and envy, were hateful, and hated each other. Even Paul confessed having sinned in those ways. But those things were in the past, when we were young and foolish, the former days.

Sinning more or less is something everyone has done when he was young. Consider Job whom Jehovah said was a perfect and upright man. The Bible tells of a time when the sons of God came to present themselves to Jehovah. Satan also came among them, and Jehovah said to him, **“Have thou considered my servant 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 later during the time of his great suffering Job confessed to have committed

iniquities in his youth, saying to God, **“For thou write bitter things against me, and make me to inherit the iniquities of my youth”** (Job 13:26).

Although we have all done such things and been that way more or less at some time in the past, now that we are children of God we must forsake them all completely. None of those things should ever stain our lives again. We must never again be foolish, never again be disobedient, never again be led astray, never again serve various lusts and pleasures, never again live in evil and envy, never again be hateful, never again hate each other.

## God appeared and saved us

- **But when the kindness and philanthropy of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not of works in righteousness that we did, but according to his mercy through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior** (Titus 3:4-6).

God loves us and is kind to us because he wants us to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him. But that can only happen if we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. He was the manifestation of God's kindness and philanthropy to us.

The Son of God came into the world to save us from the consequences of our sins. Had he not saved us we would have been condemned with the devil and the demons. Jesus brought us salvation, not because we earned it by our own works of righteousness, but according to his grace and mercy.

Paul said that God saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. That means he washed our defiled spirit by regenerating it. Remember how Jesus told how we must be begotten from above, when he said, **“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 3:6-8).

Our being begotten from the Spirit is our washing of regeneration. Our spirit is renewed from the Spirit of God by being begotten from above, and that makes it pure and holy. To be begotten means to be generated and created. And it is through the Holy Spirit of God that our spirits are regenerated and renewed. As Paul said to the disciples at Corinth, **“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).

God poured out his Holy Spirit upon us abundantly purifying us and renewing us. And that was done through his Son Jesus Christ our Savior. For no man can receive the Holy Spirit except through Christ. Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit when he said to his apostles during 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 14:17). The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit because the world rejects Christ.

## So that we may become heirs

- **So that, having been made righteous by the grace of that man, we may become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Faithful is the saying (Titus 3:7-8).**

Jesus lived a sinless life of sacrifice to God so that he could qualify to become our Redeemer. And through his redemption we are purified and made righteous in the sight of God. Jesus redeems us not because we earn it from him, but because of his grace. He extends his grace to us that way when we believe and obey him.

And that way we become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Remember what Paul said to the Roman disciples: **“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).

Paul said the saying, that we have been made righteous by the grace of Christ and will become heirs according to the hope of eternal life, was a faithful one. It is faithful because God made it, and he is always faithful. Therefore, put your hope in him and always trust him!

## Strongly insist about these things

- **And I want thee to strongly insist about these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to manage good works. These things are good and beneficial to men (Titus 3:8).**

When Paul said he wanted Titus to strongly insist about these things, he meant all of the things he had commanded. By strongly insisting obedience to those thing then those who have believed in God would be careful to manage good works.

It is the duty of every child of God to be careful to manage good works. And that is only possible by obedience to the commands of Christ. Therefore, every teacher and preacher should strongly insist upon obedience to Christ’s commands. The commands of Christ are all intended to direct our way to the paths of righteousness. And it is only through righteousness that we can have good works. Moreover, our works should also be carefully managed, and not messy and haphazard.

Paul said those things were good and beneficial to men. The commands of Christ are all good and beneficial to us. None of them are bad and harmful. The world wants you to believe that many of God’s commands are arbitrary and capricious. They do not understand their value, and so they scoff and reject them.

The ancient Jews who did not obey God’s laws of cleanliness, because they did not understand their value, suffered because of it. And modern men who do not obey God’s laws of morality, because they do not understand their value, are suffering because of it. Just look at how our social fabric is crumbling and lawlessness is increasing in the land.

## Avoid vain controversies

- **But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and fightings about law, for they are useless and vain** (Titus 3:9).

Foolish questions are ones that are ridiculous and absurd. An example would be, “If God made everything, who made God?” Another example is, “Why can’t I eat my cake and have it too?” Another one is, “Why can’t everybody do things their way?”

Genealogies are records of ancestry. The Israelites were very careful to keep genealogies. That was necessary because of land inheritances and the rights of the priesthood. Those things were part of the law of Moses, but God made that system no longer possible. The good news of Christ is a merit system, and is not based upon biological inheritance. Therefore, avoid genealogies. Concern about them is foolish and vain. Why should we as children of God care who our ancestors were? Such information does not make people better. It tends to make them worse.

Contentions are quarrels and strifes. And they too should be avoided. We will certainly have disagreements from time to time about various things. But we do not need to contend about them. We should be wise and settle our disagreements with calmness and reason. We should only contend for the faith, as Jude spoke of (see Jude 1:3).

Paul also said to avoid fightings about law. He was speaking about laws of God. However, as disciples of Christ we are not under law to God; we are under the law of liberty. Therefore, we are to avoid fightings about them. An example of fighting about law was the matter of circumcision, which some Jewish Christians demanded of the Gentiles. It required a conference of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem to eliminate that controversy (see Acts 15:25). We should fight the good fight of the faith (see First Timothy 6:12), but we should not fight about things of the law.

All of those things that Paul said to avoid—foolish questionings, genealogies, contentions, and fightings about law—are useless and vain. They accomplish nothing productive. They only cause troubles. Therefore, be wise and avoid them. Let no man provoke you about them, because you will regret it. Stand aloof about them, unless you are forced to respond, as was Paul and Barnabas about the issue of circumcision.

Moreover, beware of being provoked to speak rashly. Remember how the enemies of Christ tried to provoke him: **“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).

## Shun a factious man

- **Shun a factious man after a first and second admonition, knowing that such a man is perverted, and sins, being self-condemned** (Titus 3:10-11).

A factious man is one who loves to argue and quarrel. There are many such men in the world, but there should be none in the church, the kingdom of God. Therefore, we should shun such men among us. However, Paul said we should shun them only after giving them

a first and second admonition. That will give them the opportunity to repent and stop being factious.

When Paul said a first and second admonition, he meant to give one admonition and then wait for the man to repent. If he does not repent, then we should give him a second admonition. If he still does not repent, then we are to shun him. By continuing to be factious such a man proves himself to be perverted and sinful, and that way he condemns himself.

We must shun such men because they are perverted, both in their thinking and in their behavior. Tolerating factious men is like tolerating harmful germs in your body or poisonous creatures in your house.

Factions are destructive to the love and unity we must have to be faithful to Christ and his good news. Nevertheless, Paul said that some factions among us are going to happen: **“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).

However, that does not mean we should tolerate divisions and factions, because Paul also said, **“Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but ye may be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding”** (First Corinthians 1:10).

Our response to factions is to combat whatever is causing them. Differences in opinions should never cause divisions and factions. Differences in doctrine must be resolved with the word of God, and they can be resolved that way among authentic Christians. Those who will not accept the true doctrine of Christ as taught in the Bible will be exposed as frauds, and like factious men they condemn themselves and must be shunned.

## Instructions about various men

- **When I will send Artemas to thee, or Tychicus, be diligent 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).

Nicopolis is on the west coast of Achaia about one hundred and twenty miles northwest of Corinth. Nothing is said in the book of Acts about when Paul went there. However, the above passage suggests he was there as part a journey, because he said he decided to winter there. This is the only place Nicopolis is ever mentioned in the Bible.

Artemas is only mentioned here, but Tychicus is mentioned in the book of Acts as well as in three of Paul's other letters. Paul said he was a beloved brother and faithful helper. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul said that he sent Tychicus to Ephesus. And he told Titus in this passage that he was going to send either Tychicus or Artemas to him.

Paul also told Titus to be diligent to come to him there at Nicopolis, but he did not explain why. Neither did he explain why he was sending either Artemas or Tychicus to him. There are many such details that are not recorded in the Bible record. What we have is sufficient for us. Endless conjectures about such things are not helpful.

Zenas the lawyer is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but Apollos is mentioned twice in the book of Acts. He is also mentioned seven times in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, most of which times were about divisions in the church. Apollos was a Jew who evangelized among the Gentiles. He was a powerful orator, and some of the disciples at Corinth were beginning to align themselves with him (but without his approval).

Consequently, Paul said to them, **“Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you, but ye may be thoroughly prepared in the same mind and in the same understanding.**

**“For it was declared to me about you, my brothers, by those of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 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”** (First Corinthians 1:10-12).

Paul asked Titus to send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way diligently, so that nothing would be lacking for them. Nothing is said about where they were going nor why. Nevertheless, it is almost certain they were going on some kind of mission for the church.

## Let our men be in the lead of good works

- **And also let our men learn to be in the lead of good works for the essential needs, so that they may not be unfruitful** (Titus 3:14).

The essential needs Paul spoke about were not the needs of our flesh. He was speaking of our spiritual needs, which are the most important ones for us. And as disciples of Christ we should be in the lead of the good works for those needs. Failure to supply the essential needs of our flesh will only cause the death of our body, but failure to supply the essential needs of our spirit will cause us to suffer the death of eternal torment in hell. Remember this passage: **“This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14-15).

The essential needs of our spirit include our faith in Christ, and our obedience to all the ways of his righteousness. Paul said our men needed to learn to be in the lead of good works for those things. “Our men” refer to all of the children of God in contrast with the men of the world. And we all need to learn to be in the lead of good works for the essential needs of our spirits.

We must be in the lead, because remember 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).

We are priests of God, serving him to provide the spiritual needs of the world. Therefore, we must learn to be in the lead of good works for them. Good works for the essential spiritual needs are things like evangelizing, preaching, and teaching. We need to learn to be in the lead of those things.

Paul said that way we will not be unfruitful. To be fruitful we must first learn. We learn from the word of God, which is recorded in the words of the Bible. Without that learning we cannot be fruitful. Then when we learn we must lead in evangelizing, preaching, and

teaching Christ and his good news of salvation, so that we can lead other souls to him. If we the disciples of Christ do not lead in evangelizing, preaching, and teaching about him, then who will? Of course, that does not mean each one of us must do all of those things.

## Final farewell

- **All those with me salute thee. Salute those who love us in faith. Grace is with all of you. Truly** (Titus 3:15).

We know not who were with Paul there. They may have been traveling companions who were wintering with him there at Nicopolis. Perhaps there was even a congregation there. Nevertheless, they all saluted Titus by this letter. Paul said Titus should salute those who love us in faith. That means we should salute all who love us in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And as he always did, Paul assured them that God was with all of them. And God will always be with us when we remain faithful to him.

# A Commentary on The Letter of Paul to Philemon

## Greeting

- **Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and co-workman, and to the beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the congregation at thy house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ** (Philemon 1:1-3).

Paul said he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus. That means he was in bondage because of his service to Christ and his good news of our salvation. Conjectures have been made about when and where it was that Paul wrote this letter, but nobody knows.

In about half of Paul's letters he said they were from him and Timothy, including this one. Timothy must have transcribed Paul's words in those letters. Paul addressed this letter primarily to Philemon, but also to Apphia and Archippus, and to the congregation in Philemon's house. This letter is primarily about a bondman of Philemon named Onesimus, who is discussed a little farther.

Philemon is called a beloved and co-workman, but he is only mentioned in this letter to him. Apphia is called beloved, but neither is he mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

Paul said Archippus was their fellow soldier. In his writings Paul spoke of one other man whom he called a fellow soldier: Epaphroditus (see Philippians 2:25). However, he also spoke of Timothy as **"a good soldier of Jesus Christ"** (Second Timothy 2:3).

As disciples of Christ, we are all soldiers in the great spiritual warfare between God and the devil. Paul spoke of that warfare in his letter to the Corinthians: **"For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled"** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

Archippus is only mentioned in one other place in the Bible, which is near the end of Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he said, **"And say to Archippus, Watch the ministry that thou received in the Lord so that thou may fulfill it"** (Colossians 4:17).

Notice how Paul said there was a congregation at the house of Philemon. That means the disciples there met in the house of Philemon. Where Philemon lived is not told. However, many dogmatically claim it was in Colossae because Onesimus is mentioned in Paul's letter to the disciples there.

In all of his letters Paul called for grace and peace to them from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.

## Much joy and encouragement about him

- **I thank my God, making recollection of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the sanctified, so that the fellowship of thy faith may become potent (in the knowledge of every good thing in us) for Christ Jesus. For we have much joy and encouragement in thy love, because the bowels of the sanctified have been refreshed by thee, brother (Philemon 1:4-7).**

Paul thanked God because of Philemon, and he remembered him always in his prayers for many reasons. Paul said he had heard of his love and faith which he had toward the Lord Jesus and for all the sanctified. Paul did not say that he himself saw Philemon's love and faith toward Christ and his disciples, but that he heard of them. However, Paul had obviously met Philemon before this, because of some other things he says later in the letter.

Philemon must have been very active in promoting Christ and doing good toward those who believe in him after Paul knew him. That seems more probable, because otherwise why would Paul not have said that he saw as well as heard of Philemon's love and faith? Regardless, Philemon was a genuine Christian whose love brought much joy and encouragement to Paul and other disciples, refreshing their bowels.

The Bible uses the word bowels figuratively, similar to the way it uses the word heart. However, the figurative meaning of bowels is more limited, and refers only to the innermost feelings and emotions. Therefore, when Paul said their bowels were refreshed he meant their deepest feelings were made better. They were made better by Philemon because of the joy and encouragement his love gave to them. And we can also refresh the bowels of each other, giving joy and encouragement by our love and faith, which we also have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the sanctified.

Paul said he remembered Philemon always in his prayers so that the fellowship of his faith would become potent for Christ Jesus, potent in the knowledge of every good thing in us. Being potent in the knowledge of every good thing in us (as disciples of Christ) means being able to apply our knowledge of that which is right and good in order to achieve things for Christ and bear much fruit for him.

## Boldness in Christ to command

- **Therefore, though I have much boldness in Christ to command thee that which is befitting, because of love I rather beseech, being such as aged Paul, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Philemon 1:8-9).**

Paul said he was aged, but he does not describe his age in years. He described his age in the much boldness he had in Christ. He had lived for so long as a faithful apostle of Christ, saving many souls and establishing many congregations. Not only had his knowledge of the good news of Christ increased, but also the ability to apply that knowledge. He had achieved a special wisdom that only comes from living a life of righteousness in Christ.

Paul had not achieved that certainly when he first began, because he said to the Galatians, **“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, having**

**taken along Titus also. And I went up according to revelation, and I declared to them the good news that I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of repute, lest somehow I might be running or had run in vain”** (Galatians 2:1-2).

However, Paul now had much boldness in Christ, meaning he had much confidence in knowing what were the right and befitting things to do. Moreover, as an apostle of Christ he had the authority to command the right and befitting things to do, even in such specific cases such as that about Onesimus.

However, because of the great love he had for Philemon, Paul chose to beseech him to do what was befitting. That way Philemon would receive the full credit in the sight of God for doing what was right. Philemon could have received some credit for obeying a command from Paul, but by voluntarily doing what was right he would deserve the full credit. And it is much to our credit both in the sight of God and in the sight of men when we do the right things without being compelled.

This is the second time in this letter Paul said he was a prisoner of Christ. The first time he said he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus. This time he said he was a prisoner of Jesus Christ, which is the same as saying Jesus the Christ. Remember, the word “christ” means anointed, anointed in the sense of being chosen and consecrated. And Jesus was chosen and consecrated by God to be our Lord and Savior. Christ Jesus means the anointed Jesus, because the name Jesus was a common one in those days.

Paul may have reminded Philemon that he was a prisoner of Christ so that he would better appreciate the fact that Paul was now not only an aged man, but he was also a prisoner because of his service to the Lord. And Philemon should consider that in his decision about Paul’s appeal.

### Paul besought him about Onesimus

- **I beseech thee for my child Onesimus, whom I begot in my bonds. A man formerly unprofitable to thee, but now is profitable to thee and to me, whom I sent back** (Philemon 1:10-11).

Paul begot Onesimus in the spiritual sense, which means he converted Onesimus to Christ. Therefore, Onesimus was a spiritual child of Paul. Remember, we are all begotten in the spirit when we put on Christ; we are begotten by God to be a new spiritual creation. As Paul said to the brothers at Corinth, **“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).

As a disciple of Christ, Onesimus was a child of God, begotten by him. However, Paul could still call him his own child because it was through him that Onesimus became a new creation as a child of God. Paul fathered him in the sense of being the man who led him to Christ. And that happened when Paul was a prisoner in bonds. Nevertheless, Paul was never addressed as “father Paul” by anyone. Jesus forbade such things (see Matthew 23:9).

A little farther in this letter Paul spoke of Onesimus as being a bondman of Philemon. And apparently he was neither a willing nor a very useful bondman, because Paul said he was formerly unprofitable to Philemon. Most people believe that Onesimus was like a slave

who had escaped from Philemon. However, it is possible that Philemon just let him go because he was so unprofitable as a bondman.

Nobody knows, but I prefer to think that Philemon just release him, even though Onesimus was still obligated to serve him. That would be more in the character of a man like Philemon. Most bondmen were happy to have the security of being employed, and so they served well. Onesimus did not. Why Onesimus was unprofitable is never told. Perhaps he was forced into being a bondman against his will, and consequently resented his service. That would give Philemon another reason just to release him and accept the loss.

Nevertheless, whatever was the case, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon to fulfill his obligation of service to him. As children of God and disciples of Christ, we must always strive to do the right thing, even to the point of “going the second mile” (see Matthew 5:41). And Paul was confident that, as a new convert to Christ, Onesimus would have then served Philemon well as he ought to have.

### Permission to use Onesimus

- **And thou should welcome him, that is, my bowels. Whom I wanted to keep back for myself, so that in thy behalf he might serve me in the bonds of the good news. But I wanted to do nothing without thy mind, so that thy goodness might not be as from obligation, but from volition (Philemon 1:12-14).**

Whatever was the reason that Onesimus departed, Paul besought Philemon to welcome him back. And Paul even referred to Onesimus as his own bowels. That means Paul had the deepest feelings of affection toward Onesimus, even considering him to be a part of him. We think of our own wives and children as our own bowels in that sense. And Paul thought of Onesimus as his own child in the faith. Therefore, he besought Philemon to welcome him.

Paul said he wanted to keep Onesimus back for himself. That way he could serve him on behalf of Philemon. That way Onesimus could fulfill his obligation of bond service to Philemon. Paul wanted Onesimus to serve him in the bonds of the good news. Paul called himself a bondman of Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:1). Therefore, he was in the bonds of the good news. And Paul wanted Onesimus to serve him in that work.

However, Paul would do nothing without the full agreement of Philemon. That way Philemon would get the full credit for his generosity. It would not be from obligation, but from his own free will.

### He was a bondman, but now a beloved brother

- **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).**

Onesimus obviously confessed to Paul that he had departed from Philemon, and he no doubt told him the details. However, Paul did not say why or how or when Onesimus departed from Philemon. He simply said he departed for an hour. Of course, he was using the word “hour” in a figurative sense to mean a short time, but how short nobody knows. Paul even suggested there was a good purpose why Onesimus departed Philemon.

His departure enabled him to meet with Paul and become a disciple of Christ. That does not mean Philemon did not try to convert Onesimus. It simply suggests that Onesimus was somehow better prepared in his mind and more receptive after he departed Philemon. Perhaps by his example Philemon had prepared the mind of Onesimus to be receptive to the message of the good news that Paul was able to give him.

Hence, the departure of Onesimus resulted in his conversion, followed by his consequent willingness to return to Philemon. And that meant Onesimus would be with him “forever.” That is another example of how the word forever in the Greek does not mean the same as in English. In that context it simply means either for a long time or for the rest of his life. Paul was so confident of the full conversion of Onesimus that he expected him to be willing to remain with Philemon as long as he was required.

Upon his return Onesimus would no longer be a bondman in the sense of his relationship with Philemon. He might have been a bondman in a legal or obligatory sense. But in the real sense of his service to Philemon he would be above a bondman. He would be a beloved brother, working for him the way beloved brothers work together. He would be that way toward Philemon because he was now a brother to him in Christ.

Paul said that Onesimus was a beloved brother especially to him. Remember, Paul referred to Onesimus as his own child, begotten by him to be a disciple of Christ. Hence, he was an especially beloved brother. Yet Paul said that Onesimus was now much more a beloved brother to Philemon than he was to him. Paul did not explain why Onesimus was much more a beloved brother to Philemon. The reason is probably because of the past relationship between Onesimus and Philemon, the details of which we know nothing.

Paul said that Onesimus was a beloved brother both in the flesh and in the Lord. As disciples of Christ we are all spiritual brothers in the Lord, but we are not all brothers in the flesh. Being a brother in the flesh means (1) being of the same parents, (2) being of the same ancestry, and/or (3) being of the same social group as a brotherhood; in this case being disciples of Christ. Onesimus was a brother in the flesh by belonging both to Paul when he was with him and to Philemon as a workman for him.

### Paul offers to pay his debts

- **If then thou have me a partner, accept him as myself. But if he has wronged thee, or owes anything, charge this to me. I Paul write with my hand, I will repay, so that I may not say to thee that thou owe me in return even thyself. Yes, brother, let me have a favor of thee in the Lord. Refresh my bowels in the Lord (Philemon 1:17-20).**

Calling Onesimus his own bowels, Paul loved him so much that he considered him to be a part of himself. Therefore, he could beseech Philemon to accept Onesimus as himself, if Philemon had Paul a partner. And there is no doubt he did. When we have close partner-

ships and other personal relationships with people, it is right for us to accept their children as we do them. And Paul said that Onesimus was his child.

Notice how Paul said that *if* Onesimus had wronged Philemon or owed him anything. Many people judge Onesimus harshly, and accuse him of committing wrongs against Philemon. However, Paul never made any such accusations. Moreover, there is no other justification to accuse him. Therefore, it is wrong to judge Onesimus that way.

Like a loving and forgiving parent, Paul was even willing to recompense whatever Philemon had against Onesimus. He underscored that offer by saying he wrote it with his own hand, and also said, **“I will repay.”** However, Paul reminded Philemon of his debt to him, which debt was his very self. That means Paul was the man who brought Philemon to Christ so that he could be that new creation in his spirit, begotten from above as a child of God.

Paul spoke to Philemon as a very close friend, calling him his brother. Paul knew that his appeal to Philemon about Onesimus would be seen as requesting a favor of him. Paul wanted Philemon to give him that special act of kindness, and he did not try to conceal it. Therefore, he said plainly, **“Yes, brother, let me have a favor of thee in the Lord.”**

What Paul meant by a favor of him in the Lord was a favor as a fellow Christian. And he asked Philemon to refresh his bowels in the Lord. Refreshing his bowels meant boosting his spirits and encouraging his feelings. Remember, Paul had earlier told Philemon that he had refreshed the bowels of the sanctified, giving them much joy and encouragement in his love.

Paul was in bondage and greatly restricted in his contacts with other disciples. Having Onesimus with him must have been a great comfort to Paul during his bondage. For no doubt Onesimus served him in many helpful ways.

Paul’s great love for Onesimus is a marvelous commentary of the spirit and character of Onesimus. Paul called Timothy his son, but I know of no other man besides Onesimus that Paul said was his own bowels. Nevertheless, that does not mean Paul did not feel that way toward any other man. For I have no doubt Paul felt the same way about Timothy. Paul’s situation at this time lent itself to those special feelings toward Onesimus. Onesimus was obviously a young man of great spiritual character. For Paul was no fool; he could and did accurately judge him.

## Confidence in Philemon

- **Being confident in thine obedience I wrote to thee, knowing that thou wilt do above what I say (Philemon 1:21).**

After all those words, how could Philemon refuse to grant Paul’s appeal and still claim to love him? Paul knew enough about the character of Philemon to be confident he would do above what Paul said. Indeed, Paul said that his confidence in Philemon is why he wrote to him. That means Paul would not even have made his request if he had doubted Philemon’s response.

A lesson for us is that we should not be hasty in making major requests of each other. We should also have confidence in both the justification of our request and that it will be

granted. Otherwise, if it is seen as unreasonable and is rejected then unpleasant feelings could be aroused toward each other. Therefore, beware of making major requests of each other. It is much better to do without than to risk generating unpleasant feelings and bad memories.

## Hoping to come to him

- **But simultaneously also prepare a lodging for me, for I hope that by your prayers I will be granted to you** (Philemon 1:22).

What kind of lodging Paul wanted prepared for him is not told. He probably did not care what kind Philemon would prepare for him. Philemon could have prepared a lodging in his own house, or he could have found some other place of lodging. None of that is important for us to know.

Paul was apparently very confident that he would soon be released from bondage. Otherwise he would not have told Philemon to make the effort of preparing a lodging for him. Paul was not being presumptuous by asking Philemon to prepare a lodging for him, because he mentioned how Philemon was praying that he would come. Paul was being gracious by planning to fulfill Philemon's desire that Paul come to him. Who among us would not rejoice at the opportunity to prepare a lodging for a visit from the apostle Paul?

Although Paul asked that a lodging be prepared for him, there is no Biblical evidence Paul was released. And Paul was himself not completely certain, because he said he "hoped" that by Philemon's prayers to be granted to him. Paul went to Jerusalem (against the advice of the Holy Spirit; see Acts 21:10-11) no doubt hoping he could persuade many of his fellow Jews to believe in Jesus. However, there is no evidence he ever succeeded. Hopes are not guarantees, even when we pray about them.

## Men who saluted Philemon

- **Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, salutes thee, and Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my co-workmen** (Philemon 1:23-24).

Epaphras was a prisoner with Paul wherever that was. Epaphras is mentioned twice in Paul's letter to the Colossians, and he called him their beloved fellow bondman. The particular Mark mentioned in that passage was probably John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. Aristarchus is mentioned three times in the book of Acts. He is also mentioned once in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he called him his fellow prisoner. Demas is also mentioned in that letter. Luke is considered the man who wrote a biography of Jesus, and also the book of Acts. Luke often accompanied Paul during his travels. Paul said all of those men were his co-workmen.

Regarding Demas, Paul told Timothy, in his second letter to him, that Demas had forsaken him: **"Hurry to come to me quickly, for Demas forsook me having loved the present age ..."** (Second Timothy 4:9-10). The difference in Demas' relationship with Paul when Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus, and when he wrote his second letter to Timothy, has been used to support the idea that Paul was released during this time of bondage. It is

conjectured that Paul did many other things that are not recorded in the Bible record before being imprisoned again and then killed.

Nevertheless remember, the last entry in the Bible record about the activities of Paul is this one at the end of the book of Acts: **“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).

I do not like to conjecture about things of the Bible without having Bible evidence. And there is no convincing Bible evidence that Paul was released and went on to do many other unrecorded things, as many other men have conjectured. It is quite possible that Paul wrote Philemon early in his two years of bondage at Rome. And it was near the end of those two years that Paul told Timothy how Demas had forsaken him.

Remember, in this letter to Philemon, when Paul referred to Demas as a co-workman, he spoke of himself as **“being such as aged Paul, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ”** (Philemon 1:9). Paul was already an aged man when Demas was still faithful to him. And then later when he told Timothy that Demas had forsaken him, Paul spoke of his imminent death: **“For I am already poured out a libation, and the time of my dissolution is imminent”** (Second Timothy 4:6).

Hence, the Bible evidence tells me that Paul was a prisoner at Rome for two years, after which he was put to death for the cause of Christ. There is no scriptural evidence that Paul was ever able to visit Philemon after writing this letter to him.

### His closing words

- **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit. Truly** (Philemon 1:25).

Those were encouraging words that Paul wrote at the end of several of his letters.

## A Commentary on The Letter to the Hebrews

This book is like several others in the Bible by not giving the name of the author. Several times the text uses the word “we.” However, that does not necessarily indicate there were multiple authors. For Paul often used the word we when he wrote his letters. The meaning of we in this letter may simply mean there were other Christian brothers with the author when he wrote it, and they shared with what he was saying.

The most common name suggested as the author of this book is the apostle Paul. If I had to make a guess I would agree with them. Nevertheless, we cannot say definitely that he was the author. The important thing to remember is that the ultimate author of all the books of the Bible is the Holy Spirit of God. The Bible is the word of God written through the hands of men.

### The ways God has spoken

- **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).

Speaking in many portions means speaking different things in different amounts. God spoke to the ancestors of the Hebrews (“the fathers”) by certain men that he chose. Those men are called the prophets. And their words have been recorded for us in the Old Testament of the Bible. Those words were written by different men over a period of about a thousand years.

Not only did God speak different things to different men, but he spoke in many ways. Some of the ways that God spoke were through voices, some of which were in dreams, and some in visions. We know of one time when he spoke to Abraham in the form of a man (see Genesis 18). He spoke to Moses first through the burning bush (see Exodus 3:4). Later he spoke to him mouth to mouth (see Numbers 12:7-8). God even used things like lots cast by certain men to communicate his will (see Exodus 28:30).

But now in these last days he spoke by a Son. What is meant by the last days is the era of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. And it was through him that God has spoken in these last days. God no longer speaks different things in many ways to different men. He now speaks only through his Son. And we can hear what he says from the words of the New Testament. It is the only way that God now speaks to us.

Men are continually claiming that God has spoken to them outside of the Bible. They are either liars or deluded, and not to be trusted regardless of how convincing they may sound. God **“spoke to us in these last days by a Son,”** and only by him. What the apostles said in the Bible were the words of God’s Son. And only they were authorized to give them to us after his ascension into heaven.

Hence, only the Bible contains the word of God. Let no man deceive you into thinking otherwise. God no longer speaks to any man directly. Any voices you may hear are not

his. To think otherwise is to deny the beginning words of this holy book. Let not any man deceive you. Let not your own mind deceive you, but remember these words of the prophet Jeremiah: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was appointed heir of all things even before the beginning of all things, because it was through him that God made the ages. It was through God’s Son Jesus Christ that time began, that the ages began. It was through him that all things were made. 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 1:3).

One of the reasons the Son came into this world and lived as a man was to prove his absolute worthiness to be heir of all things. And all who believe and obey him will be heirs with him. For 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).

### Jesus, the exact image of God’s essence

- **Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights** (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact image of God’s essence. To radiate is to project, to send out, to transmit. And that is what Jesus has done with the glory of God. He projects God’s glory; he sends out God’s glory, and he transmits God’s glory. Jesus is the means by which God has revealed his glory to mankind.

Remember, Jesus was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. For when Paul was speaking of the wilderness travels of the sons of Israel on their way to the promised land, he said about them, **“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).

And when the Son was in the world as Jesus the Christ, he radiated the glory of God with his great wisdom and his mighty miracles, as well as his many acts of compassion toward the poor and the afflicted. Remember how he answered Philip when he asked him to show them the Father: **“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).

That passage also helps explain how the Son is the exact image of God’s essence. It was not the fleshly body of Jesus that was the exact image of God’s essence. It was the spirit of God in his body that was the exact image of God’s essence. However, now that the Son is back in heaven, he has a glorious spiritual body. And that spiritual body is also the exact image of God’s essence.

The apostle John described that spiritual body when he wrote of his vision of heaven. For he said, **“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 1:13-16).

I speak much more about the nature of God and his glory in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The author of Hebrews also said that the Son of God upholds all things by the word of his power. He upholds all things through the seven lamps of fire that radiate from God’s throne. Those lamps uphold all things by supplying the energy for everything in the world. They are like the power plants that supply the electricity that supports the civilized world. And the Son of God controls that divine energy from the throne of God by his commands, by the word of his power. God has given him that authority.

I also explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The Son of God, through the man Jesus Christ, also made purification of our sins through himself. He was able to purify us of our sins because he earned that right from God. He earned it by his perfect life of obedience to the commands of God, even to the point of submitting to the pain and humiliation of death by crucifixion.

By his perfect life of obedience to God, he not only earned the right to become our Redeemer, but he also proved beyond doubt his moral and spiritual superiority over every other soul, except for the Father himself. Therefore, the Son of God now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights, meaning in the throne of heaven with God the Father.

I also describe more of those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for eternity*.

## So much better than the agents

- **Having become so much better than the agents, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they** (Hebrews 1:4).

The Son of God inherited a more excellent name than the agents of heaven by being the only begotten Son of God. But notice how that passage says the Son of God became so much better than the agents (the agents of heaven). He became so much better by proving his moral and spiritual superiority.

Had the Son of God not come into the world to live as a man, he could not have proven his worthiness to sit in the throne of God and reign over all things. Creatures like Satan could have accused God of being partial to his Son. Jesus proved them wrong by living a life of perfect obedience to God in this world of trials and temptations.

And we too must prove our worthiness in this life to become sons of God for eternity in heaven. We prove our worthiness by believing and obeying the Son of God. For only he can redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

## Today I have begotten thee

- **For to which of the agents did he ever say, Thou are my Son, today I have begotten thee?** (Hebrews 1:5).

The author next quotes several passages to show the superiority of the Son of God over the agents of heaven. The first passage is from the second psalm: **“I will tell of the decree. Jehovah said to me, Thou are my Son, this day I have begotten thee”** (Psalm 2:7).

Everyone agrees that passage in Psalms is about the Son of God. Indeed, the entire psalm is about him. That passage in Psalms says that the Son was begotten of God. It is the only passage in the Old Testament that speaks of the Son as being begotten of God. However, there are several in the New Testament that do. One of the most beautiful of them is this one: **“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).

The passage in the psalm mentions a day when God begot his Son. That is just another of many passages that deny the theory of the trinity. Nevertheless, as the Jews interpret every Old Testament prophecy about Jesus as being a prophecy about Israel, so also the believers in the trinity theory interpret passages like the one in the psalm as being about his life in the flesh. But how could that passage be about his earthly birth? God was not speaking to a newborn babe to whom words mean nothing.

Regarding the earthly body of Jesus, believers in the trinity theory call it his “incarnate self.” Neither that expression nor the idea behind it is found in the Bible. The truth is that both the Father and the Son have bodies. The Son merely transferred his spirit from his heavenly body to his earthly body.

The spirits that have no bodies, the naked spirits, are those condemned in hell. Paul mentioned that when he was speaking about our glorious body in heaven, which he referred to as our habitation in heaven: **“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, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked”** (Second Corinthians 5:1-3).

Regarding the body of Adam, he was also called a son of God (see Luke 3:38), but he was not begotten like the Son of God in heaven. How the Son of God was begotten in heaven is a great mystery. Nevertheless, how he was begotten is similar to that of Adam in the sense that when he was begotten his body was fully developed. However, Adam was begotten with a body of flesh, but the only begotten Son of God in heaven was begotten with an imperishable body. I speak more about all of those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## A Father and a Son

- **And again, I will be to him for a Father, and he will be to me for a Son?** (Hebrews 1:5).

That quotation **“I will be to him for a Father, and he will be to me for a Son”** is found in what Jehovah said to David in response to his desire to build a house (a temple) for God. Jehovah sent the prophet Nathan to speak to David, and here is part of what he said to him: **“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. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.**

**“If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the sons of men, but my loving kindness shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul whom I put away before thee. And thy house and thy kingdom shall be made sure forever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever”** (Second Samuel 7:12-16).

That prophecy is about both Solomon and Jesus Christ. both of whom were sons of David. Solomon build the earthly house for the name of Jehovah, which was the temple at Jerusalem. And he did commit iniquity. Therefore, God chastened him by other men, but he never took the kingdom from him as he did Saul before David. Here is what the record says about those adversaries:

**And Jehovah raised up an adversary to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. He was of the king’s seed in Edom** (First Kings 11:14).

**And God raised up another adversary to him, Rezon the son of Eliada, who had fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah. And he gathered men to him, and became captain over a troop when David killed them of Zobah. And they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, besides the mischief that Hadad did. And he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.**

**And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon whose mother’s name was Zeruah, a widow, he also lifted up his hand against the king** (First Kings 11:23-26).

The kingdom and the throne that would be forever was through Jesus Christ. And it was about him that Jehovah said, **“I will be his father, and he shall be my son.”**

## Bringing the firstborn into the world

- **And again when he brings the firstborn into the world he says, And let all the agents of God worship him** (Hebrews 1:6).

Those words **“when he brings the firstborn into the world he says, And let all the agents of God worship him”** are not found in the Bible. However, a passage in the psalms has been suggested as expressing the thought of it: **“Bow yourselves to him, all ye gods”** (Psalm 97:7). The agents of God are all gods in the sense that we are gods. We are all gods because we are all offspring of God. Even Jesus proclaimed that, when he said to the Jews, **“Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods?”** (John 10:34).

Although that passage in the book of Hebrews is not a quotation from the Bible, the Old Testament does speak of other books that are not in the Bible. Here is one example: **“And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son (and he bade them teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar): Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places! How are the mighty fallen!”** (Second Samuel 1:17-19). The books that God has preserved for the Bible are sufficient for us.

That passage in Hebrews speaks of the Son of God as being the firstborn. However, Jesus was certainly not the firstborn in the world. He was the firstborn in the sense of being the only begotten Son of God in heaven. He is called the firstborn, because we too as children of God are born of him. As 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).

That passage in Hebrews is another one showing how Jesus the Son of God is superior to the agents, because they are commanded to worship him.

### Toward the agents he says

- **And indeed toward the agents he says, He who makes his agents spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire** (Hebrews 1:7).

That passage is also from the psalms. Speaking about Jehovah, the psalmist said, **“... who makes his agents spirits, his ministers a flame of fire ...”** (Psalm 104:4). An agent is a representative empowered to act for whom they serve. The agents who serve the Son of God are spirits in the spiritual world of heaven. The Bible sometimes tells how God sent them into the world, and they always had the form of men.

The words that say God made his ministers a flame of fire mean they have great power. Yet they are still ministers to the Son of God, being inferior to him.

### A scepter of straightness

- **But toward the Son, Thy throne, O God, is into the age of the age. The scepter of thy kingdom is a scepter of straightness** (Hebrews 1:8).

The passage quoted here (and the next one) is also from the psalms: **“Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. A scepter of straightness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness. Therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions”** (Psalm 45:6-7).

In the former passage the agents of heaven were spoken of as being ministers. But in the above passage the Son of God is spoken of as being a king on an eternal throne, one that endures into the age of the age. His throne is eternal because he is king of the eternal kingdom.

Peter spoke of that, when he said, **“Therefore, brothers, instead be diligent to make your calling and selection sure, for doing these things, ye would, no, not ever stumble.**

**For so the entrance will be furnished to you abundantly into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** (Second Peter 1:10-11).

A scepter is a rod that symbolizes sovereign authority. And the scepter of **“the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** is a scepter of straightness. His sovereign authority is based upon straightness, which means it is based upon justice and righteousness. As the psalmist said of him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2).

## Loved righteousness and hated lawlessness

- **Thou have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Because of this, God, thy God, anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions** (Hebrews 1:9).

The Son of God has both loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. In order to please God the Father it is not enough just to love righteousness. Like the Son of God we must also hate lawlessness. And **“sin is lawlessness”** (First John 3:4). Therefore, like the Son of God we must hate sin.

And that includes hating wicked sinners. As the psalmist said, **“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). God abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man.

The author of Hebrews said, that because the Son of God loved righteousness and hated wickedness, then God, his God, anointed him with the oil of gladness above his companions. God anointed him in the ultimate way by making him the Christ (Christ means the anointed, the one ultimate anointed).

Remember, being anointed means being chosen in a special way. And because the Son of God loved righteousness and hated wickedness, then God chose him in that special most exalted way to be the Christ who is Lord of lords and King of kings.

And his anointing was with **“the oil of gladness.”** He was chosen and anointed to bring triumph and victory over sin and all of God’s enemies. His victorious life of perfect obedience to God here upon the earth brought gladness and rejoicing in heaven (see Revelation 12:9-12). And at the end of the world it will bring gladness and rejoicing to every man who loves him, believes in him, and obeys him.

God anointed his only begotten Son in heaven with the oil of gladness above his companions. His companions are all who have been predestined to be glorified with him. Paul spoke of that, when he said, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to purpose. 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. 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 8:28-30). And God has given us the freedom

to choose to live as one predestined for sonship with Jesus, or to live in the sinful ways of his enemies.

God anointed his only begotten Son in heaven with the oil of gladness above his companions because he is the most worthy. And he proved his worthiness by living a perfect life of obedience to God in the world, rejecting every temptation of the devil, even sacrificing his life upon the cross in obedience to the will of the Father.

### The world perishes, the Lord is permanent

- **And thou, Lord, at the beginnings founded the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They will perish, but thou are permanent. And they will all become old as a garment. And thou will roll them up as a mantle, and they will be changed. But thou are the same, and thy years will not cease** (Hebrews 1:10-12).

That is also a quotation from the psalms: **“Of old thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shall endure. Yea, all of them shall grow old like a garment. As a vesture thou shall change them, and they shall be changed, but thou are the same, and thy years shall have no end”** (Psalm 102:25-27).

That is one of the few passages in the Old Testament that speak of the eventual end of the world. The author of Hebrews had been quoting passages that show the superiority of the Son of God over the agents of heaven. With the above passage he speaks of the ultimate superiority of the Lord God. He created the heavens and the earth. They will become old, and he will change them. But God is the same forever.

I speak more about how the earth and the heavens will be changed at the end of the world, in my comments about Second Peter 3:10.

### Sitting at the right hand of God

- **But to which of the agents has he ever said, Sit thou by my right hand until I place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet?** (Hebrews 1:13).

That passage is also a quotation from the psalms: **“Jehovah says to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool”** (Psalm 110:1). It is another of many passages given to show the superiority of the Son of God over the agents.

The words “my Lord” that the psalmist used refer to the Son of God. It was for him that Jehovah said to sit at his right hand. It was for the Son to sit at the right hand of the Father because he proved his absolute superiority to all others, except for the Father only.

That passage also speaks of the enemies of the Son of God. He has enemies in heaven as well as enemies upon the earth. Remember, it was not until after his life of perfect obedience as a man in the world with a body of flesh that the devil and his agents were cast out of heaven to the earth. As 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”** (Revelation 12:7-9).

The devil and his agents have been allowed to roam the earth, but God’s enemies in heaven are now bound up to chains of darkness. As Peter 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). However, the time is coming when all of the enemies of the Son of God will be in bondage in complete subjection to him.

## The agents are ministering spirits

- **Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service for the sake of those who are going to inherit salvation?** (Hebrews 1:14).

The devil hates all men. He supports those who serve him, but he still hates them. He supports them the way a drunkard supports his liquor bottle until it no longer becomes of use to him. Then it becomes to him a piece of trash to discard. The devil is incapable of loving anything but himself. For God said of him, **“His heart is as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone”** (Job 41:24).

Because the devil hates us he has spread the lie that we are merely animals with no meaning or purpose except to survive and pursue pleasure and happiness. But the truth is that we are offspring of God with the potential to become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

Because the devil hates us he has also spread the lie that the world is an insignificant speck in the vast universe. But the truth is that we are the center of the universe in the eyes of Almighty God who created everything. The earth is like what the nation of Israel was during the times of the Bible. That tiny country was the spiritual center of the world.

Because the devil hates us he has spread the lie that we are not gods. But Jesus said that we are. And he quoted a passage about it, when he said to the Jews, **“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 blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God?”** (John 10:34-36).

Because the devil hates us he has spread the lie that we are inferior to the agents of heaven. But the above passage in Hebrews says they are all ministering spirits, sent forth for service for our sake, meaning all who believe and obey the Son of God. We are inferior to the agents only in having a body of flesh. In heaven we will be their judges. For Paul said, **“Know ye not that we will judge agents?”** (First Corinthians 6:3).

The agents of heaven are all ministering spirits to serve us, but no man will inherit heaven if he is not humble and lowly in spirit, and endures the trials and temptations that are part of living a righteous life on the earth.

## Give more earnest heed

- **Because of this we ought to give more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest we might slip away. For if the word spoken through agents became certain and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how will we escape, having neglected so great a salvation? (Hebrews 2:1-3).**

After mentioning all those scriptures from the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews urged us to give more earnest heed to the things that were heard. What he meant by the things that were heard are the scriptures of the Holy Bible. Its first words are those of the Old Testament. And they were spoken through various agents of God, both those from heaven and those on the earth.

An example of a man who was called an agent of God is the prophet Haggai. For the Bible says, **“Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him. And the people feared before Jehovah. Then Haggai, Jehovah’s agent, spoke in Jehovah’s message to the people, saying, I am with you, says Jehovah”** (Haggai 1:12-13).

The author of Hebrews said we ought to give more earnest heed to those things lest we might slip away. That means we must give more earnest heed to the word of God lest we slip away from our faith in him into a life of sinfulness. For the devil is continually striving to lead us astray. And for most people he has succeeded.

The author of Hebrews further warned about slipping away by mentioning how the word spoken through agents became certain and every sin received a just recompense of reward. By a just recompense of reward he means the appropriate punishment. The author was speaking of the will of God that is taught in the Old Testament. There are many examples, but God’s will was spoken in great detail to the sons of Israel through the law of Moses. And in that law God made very clear that every transgression and disobedience was to receive its appropriate punishment, its just recompense of reward.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of God punishing transgressions and disobedience to him. It begins with the sin of Adam, and then with the sin of his son Cain. God even destroyed the entire population of the earth with a great flood because of transgressions and disobedience to him. Only the righteous man Noah and his family were spared in that flood. And even if men escape just punishment in this life, they will not escape it in the afterlife, unless they are redeemed by Jesus Christ while upon the earth.

Hence, since every sin receives its just punishment, then how will we escape if we neglect the great salvation that is offered by God’s Son Jesus Christ? Jesus gave many warnings that are recorded in the Bible about being prepared for the final judgment. You can read them in the biographies of him by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

## First spoken by the Lord

- **Which first, having taken to be spoken by the Lord, was verified for us by those who heard; God also testifying simultaneously by signs and wonders,**

**and by various powers and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his will** (Hebrews 2:3-4).

That great salvation was first taken to be spoken by the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father is the author of that salvation. And Jesus was the first to take it from him to be spoken to us. For 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).

The author of Hebrews says that salvation was verified for us by those who heard. To verify means proving to be true by demonstration, evidence, or testimony. Those who heard the Lord speak of that salvation testified of the truth of it.

Every man who is humble, open minded, and loves truth and righteousness knows that great salvation is true when he hears the authentic words of it. He knows those words came from God, because Jesus said his sheep would hear his voice and would follow him. We who hear his voice and follow him are his sheep.

Jesus spoke of those things to the Jews who were against him, when he said, **“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).

We hear the voice of Jesus when we hear and accept the words of the Bible. Remember the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. After they both died the rich man in Hades wanted Lazarus to be sent back to warn his brothers. Here is what the record says about that: **“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 record of Moses and the prophets comprise the Old Testament. That parable was spoken before the New Testament was written. Therefore, we can say that if a man will not listen to the words of the Bible, neither would he be persuaded if some man would rise from the dead and testify to him.

And while Jesus and his apostles were speaking the words of that great salvation, God was testifying to the truth of it **“by signs and wonders, and by various powers and distributions of the Holy Spirit according to his will.”** It was through the power of God that Jesus was able to perform his many miracles, the signs and wonders. Remember what he said about that: **“... the Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10).

It was also the power of God that enabled Jesus’ apostles to perform signs and wonders. And it was through God’s Holy Spirit that various powers were distributed to some of the early disciples. Those powers were called gifts of the Holy Spirit, and Paul wrote of them 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). But those things are no longer given now that we have the New Testament record.

## What is man

- **For he did not subject the coming world to agents, about which we speak. 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** (Hebrews 2:5-8).

The coming world is the new heavens and earth after this one is over. And unlike this world, that world will be completely subject to God and to us his sons. The apostle John spoke of that when he described his great vision of heaven: **“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.**

**“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).

The passage that the author of Hebrews said came from the testimony of a certain man is from 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 psalmist who wrote those words marveled because God cares for us. He humbly recognized how small and frail we are in this massive world. Therefore, he wondered why God even thinks of us. The fact of our frailty in the world has been used by the disciples of the devil to cast doubt upon the words of the Bible like those in that psalm. They would have us believe that we are mere animals that are insignificant to the Creator, if indeed there is a creator, as they say. Nevertheless those words in that psalm tell us that God does think of us, and has elevated us above everything else in the world.

The words in that psalm refer both to mankind and to the Son of God. Jesus often called himself the son of man. Indeed, I counted over eighty times in the Bible where Jesus was

recorded as having called himself the son of man. God made mankind a little lower than the agents because we live in a body of flesh.

And he made us to have dominion over the world. Remember what God said when he created mankind: **“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 1:28). And our power over the world and the things in it is obvious to all who have eyes to see; although that power is far from being absolute, because we must struggle to survive and develop. I speak more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for eternity*.

Jesus Christ was crowned with supreme glory and honor when he lived here a perfect life of sacrifice in obedience to God. And through his redemption of us we too will be given glory and honor if we live in faithful obedience to him. For Peter said, **“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 1:6-7). And Paul said, **“... to those who indeed seek by perseverance of good work, glory and honor and immortality—eternal life”** (Romans 2:7).

### All things subordinated to him

- **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 2:8).

God has commanded subordination to his Son Jesus Christ. But his unrepentant enemies continue to disobey and defy him. That is why we do not yet see all things subordinated to him. God is allowing disobedience now because he is testing our souls to see who makes himself worthy to be chosen a son of God for eternity.

But when this world is over all of his enemies will be bound and cast into the lake of fire. Then they will be subordinate to him because they will have no choice. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### His suffering of death

- **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** (Hebrews 2:9).

Even Jesus the only begotten Son of God was made a little something less than the agents. He was made that way when he put on a body of flesh to live as a man in the world. That was when he became a son of man.

The above passage gives two reasons why he was made a little something less than the agents. And I believe they are better explained by separating the words of them. Here is the first reason why he was made a little something less than the agents: **“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 ... .”**

The Son of God was made a little something less than the agents so that because of the suffering of death he would be crowned with glory and honor. He was crowned that way because he lived a life of perfect obedience to God, even enduring the suffering of death on a cross in obedience to his heavenly Father.

Notice how the passage says **“because of the suffering of death, has been crowned with glory and honor.”** That means he was not crowned with glory and honor until his suffering of death. However, that does not mean he did not have glory and honor in heaven before that happened. It means he was given the ultimate crown of glory and honor to reign over all things.

The Son of God proved his moral and spiritual superiority beyond challenge, so that he deserves the supreme glory and honor. No longer can the devil or the demons or any man challenge the right of Jesus to have the ultimate glory and honor, and to reign over him.

Here is the second reason why he was made a little something less than the agents: **“But we see Jesus who has been made a little something less than the agents ... so that by the grace of God he would taste of death for every man.”**

Since every man eventually tastes of death, Jesus too tasted of death. And he did it for every man. He did it for every man so that he could earn the right to redeem every man. If he had not become our Redeemer, then we would all have remained condemned for our sins with the devil and the demons. For God is completely impartial.

And it was by the wonderful grace of God that he sent his only begotten Son into the world so that he could earn the right to redeem us. It was by his grace because he loves us. Remember these beautiful words: **“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).

## Made perfect through sufferings

- **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 2:10).

The author said that all things are through the Son of God. Remember what 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). It was through his Son Jesus Christ that God created the world.

The author also said that all things are because of the Son of God. All things are because of him because only he was able to make all things worthy of being made. Only he was able to make all things have a meaning and a purpose. And that meaning and purpose is that God would have many other sons in heaven with him.

Before time began God wanted to share life, to share his life, not created life. Therefore, he brought his only begotten Son into being. And it was through him that all things were

made. And it was because of him that God could have other sons. For without him no one could be worthy to be a son of God for eternity with him in heaven. It is only by his redemptive power that we can become worthy. And that is how he brought many sons to glory.

Paul explains it in these words to the brothers at Rome: **“And the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all and upon all those who believe, for there is no distinction. 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 3:22-26).

God the Father could not himself become a son of man. He could not leave his throne in heaven to live in the world as a man. For it is in his throne, which is his command center, by which he reigns over all things. I explain much more about God’s command center in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Therefore, God sent his only begotten Son to live fully like a man. God sent him because of his grace toward us, because he loves us. And he knew that his Son would not fail, even though every other man fails. Only God’s Son could defeat sin and the devil, and redeem us from being condemned with the devil. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Therefore, it was fitting for God to make the Pathfinder of our salvation fully perfect through sufferings. The Son of God has always been perfect in the sense of never having sinned. However, he could not become our redeemer unless he lived in the world as a man and suffered with us. That is what made him a fully perfect Pathfinder of our salvation. He made our salvation possible and he showed us the way. And our salvation enables us to receive the glory of becoming sons of God for eternity.

Think of it! You can become a son of God and live with him in heaven for eternity. There is no blessing that could ever be greater, because that blessing includes every other blessing. Is our Lord Jesus not the most wonderful and worthy lord? And is not our Creator God the most wonderful and loving Father? How can you not love them?

Remember however, you can only become a Son of God for eternity if you faithfully believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

## He and we are all of one

- **For both he who sanctifies and those being sanctified are all of one, because of which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will declare thy name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to thee. And again, I will be a man who has trusted in him. And again, Behold, I and the children that God has given me** (Hebrews 2:11-13).

He who sanctifies is our Lord Jesus Christ. And we who believe and obey him are those being sanctified. Being sanctified means being cleansed, set apart, and made holy. And it

is through Christ that we are sanctified because only he has the power to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

The author of Hebrews says in that passage that both he and we are all of one. That means we all have one heavenly Father. As the Son of God was begotten from the Father so we too are begotten of him. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus: **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

Of course Jesus is the only begotten Son of God having been begotten in heaven. And he proved himself to be superior to every other son of God. Yet since we are all of one, being all begotten of the Father, then we are all brothers. And our Lord Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers. Those who believe in the false idea of the trinity are ashamed to call us brothers of Christ. But Christ is not ashamed to call us brothers. And my heart leaps for joy within me because we are his brothers and he is not ashamed of us.

The author next quotes three passages from the Old Testament in support of what he said about our being brothers with the Son of God. The first one is from the psalms, and it says, **“I will declare thy name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation I will praise thee”** (Psalm 22:22).

The other passages quoted are from the prophet Isaiah. The following one is about being a man who trusts God: **“Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid, for Jehovah, even Jehovah, is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation”** (Isaiah 12:2).

This next passage is about how God the Father gave us to his Son Jesus Christ: **“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”** (Isaiah 8:18). God gave us to his Son because Jesus bought us (with his blood sacrifice). As Paul said to the Corinthians, **“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).

## Making the devil impotent

- **Since therefore the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might make him who has the power of death impotent, that is, the devil** (Hebrews 2:14).

Since we are brothers with the Son of God, he shared living with us in this world in a body of flesh and blood. He left his glory in heaven to be born in a body of flesh and lived a life fully as a man. Indeed, he lived as a completely normal man for the first thirty years of his life. It was not until he was about thirty years old that he began his ministry (see Luke 3:23). Before that time he lived as a humble carpenter. He share living in a body of flesh just like we do.

And being in a body of flesh he also died in the flesh. That way he was able to **“make him who has the power of death impotent, that is, the devil.”** The devil had the power of

death because he could successfully accuse us of guilt before God. And just like Adam, our guilt condemns us to death. To be just and impartial, God was required to condemn us to death for our guilt, just as he condemned Adam. And since the devil is able to tempt every man to sin, that gave him the power of death, the power to cause the death of every man, just as he caused the death of Adam. And if God prevents the devil from tempting us, we could never prove our worthiness to become his sons for eternity with him in heaven.

However, Jesus made the devil impotent by living a life of perfect obedience to God as a man in the flesh, even though tempted in every way. Therefore, as a just reward for his perfect obedience, God gave him the right to redeem from condemnation all who believe and obey his Son. That took away the devil's power of death over our eternal spirits (the second death of existence in hell), so that we are now freed from that condemnation.

Remember what they said in heaven after Jesus ascended back there: **“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).

Since the Son of God has redeemed us, the devil can no longer accuse us. His power of death over our spirits is now impotent. Remember these beautiful words of Paul: **“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.**

**“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. 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 8:33-39).

Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not as long as we continue to trust and obey him.

## Liberating us from condemnation

- **And he might liberate these, as many as throughout all their lifetime were deserving of bondage, with a specter of death** (Hebrews 2:16).

If you read other versions of the New Testament you will see that passage as one of the most mistranslated in the Bible. According to their translations it never made any sense to me. They make it say we are in a lifetime of bondage because of fear of death. How can fear of death put us in a lifetime of bondage? There are countless numbers of sinners who have no fear of death. Indeed, many even mock death. Was it only those who have a fear of death that Jesus liberated? Of course not.

What that passage really says is that because of our sins we were deserving of bondage, with a specter of death. A specter is an object of fear. Hell is certainly an object of fear, and we were all condemned to hell before Jesus liberated us.

Hence, that passage means we deserved to be condemned to bondage in the death called hell. For hell is death, the second death: **“This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14-15). It is a living death, an existence of eternal torment.

## Not agents, but the seed of Abraham

- **For he certainly did not embrace agents, but he embraced the seed of Abraham** (Hebrews 2:16).

To embrace means to affectionately hold something. And that passage said Jesus Christ the Son of God has embraced the seed of Abraham, which means all who have faith in God. For the apostle Paul said that Abraham **“is father of us all,”** all who have a trusting faith in God.

In this passage Paul told how we are Abraham’s seed because of our faith: **“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).

Notice again how the author of Hebrews in that passage contrasts the Son of God with the agents of heaven. It was not the agents that the Son embraced. It was the seed of Abraham, meaning all men who have faith in God as he did. Jesus holds us affectionately because we are his brothers, while the agents are ministering spirits for us. Remember this passage about them: **“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service for the sake of those who are going to inherit salvation?”** (Hebrews 1:14).

## He was made like his brothers

- **Therefore he was obligated to be made like his brothers in accordance with all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God, in order to make reconciliation for the sins of the people** (Hebrews 2:17).

Notice how the passage says he was obligated to be made (future tense) like his brothers. That means we were his brothers before he ever came into the world. That is just more evidence against the trinity theory. He was a son of God in heaven as well as upon the earth, just as we are sons of God. He is greater than we are because he is the only begotten Son of God. Moreover, by living as a man in the world, he proved himself to be spiritually greater than we are in every way.

The Son of God was obligated to be made like us in according with all things, including to live in a body of flesh, so that he could make reconciliation for our sins. It was necessary for him to live as a man in the world so that he could earn the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins. For only he has the qualities of character and the strength of spirit to be able to live a life of perfect obedience to God in this world of temptations, trials, and tribulations.

And by being made like us in accordance with all things he has become a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God. A priest is someone who serves as an intermediary between men and God. Remember how Peter said that we are God's priests: **“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).

The Lord has made us his priests so that we **“might broadly proclaim the excellencies of him ... .”** Therefore, it is our duty to evangelize, calling upon sinners to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, whatever our station in life may be, we must look for the opportunities to broadly proclaim the excellencies of him. That is one major reason we must continually study his holy word, so that we can be prepared for any opportunity.

And being priests in a royal priesthood, Jesus is our high priest in things toward God. The high priest is the only one who has direct access to God. All other priests must work through him. That is how it was with the law of Moses, and that is how it is with us in the kingdom of God.

And the Son of God could only have become a high priest by being made like us in accordance with all things. And having become a high priest he became a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God. For he seeks the salvation of all men. He offers to redeem the life of any man who will believe in him, repent of his sins, be immersed in water for the remission of them, and always live in faithful obedience to him. That is how he makes reconciliation for our sins.

How much more merciful and faithful could he be? Saving the souls of all men would simply extend suffering, because unrepentant sinners would fill heaven with their sin and wickedness. For suffering and death are the inevitable consequences of sin. It is a contradiction to say that sin can exist without suffering. It is like saying a naked man can enter fire and not be burnt.

Never forget this good advice: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap. Because he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life”** (Galatians 6:7-8).

## He himself suffered and was tempted

- **For in that he himself has suffered, having been tempted, he is able to help those being tempted** (Hebrews 2:18).

Jesus Christ the Son of God was subject to many temptations while he lived here upon the earth. He lived in a normal body of flesh just like every other man. Yet he alone of all men lived a life of perfect obedience to God. Nevertheless, although he never fell to temptation

he is still able to help those being tempted because he also experienced temptations. He knows what it is like to be tempted.

To tempt is to arouse a desire for something wrong. However, not all efforts to tempt result in temptation. Temptation occurs only when the desire to do something wrong is aroused. And that does not always happen. Nevertheless, we all face experiences that do tempt us because we live in a body of flesh that has many evil desires. Remember what Paul said about that: **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that what ye may want, these things ye should not do”** (Galatians 5:17).

Some people do not believe that Jesus ever had an evil desire. It was his divine spirit that never had an evil desire. But he did live in a normal body of flesh that did have evil desires, just like the rest of us. Therefore he was tempted. Yet unlike the rest of us, he never succumbed to temptation. He remained sinless.

Although he never yielded to temptation, he was tempted. And resisting temptation causes suffering. Yielding to temptation brings pleasure, which is what makes temptation so threatening. It is the rejection of temptation that causes suffering. Suffering that way varies from very mild to very severe.

The most severe suffering Jesus experienced was the temptation to escape his cruel trial and crucifixion. Remember what Luke said happened in the garden just before his betrayal: **“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). It was the temptation to escape that ordeal that caused his agony.

That temptation may have caused him more agony than the actual trial and crucifixion themselves. It was the devil’s ultimate temptation for Christ. It was also the devil’s last temptation; the only remaining chance he had to defeat the Lord. Thank God that Jesus never failed, because he is our only hope.

Jesus, having suffered from temptation, he is indeed able to help all who are being tempted. He knows what it is like to be tempted. He knows the suffering it can bring. And he also knows how to resist temptation. Sometimes we can combat it directly, as Jesus did with the devil’s temptations in the wilderness (see Matthew 4). Sometimes we can flee from it, as Joseph the son of Jacob did when he was tempted to commit adultery (see Genesis 3:12). However, when those things are not possible Jesus showed us the way to resist when he prayed intensely to his heavenly Father.

## He was faithful to him who appointed him

- **Because of which, holy brothers, companions of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation, Jesus Christ, who was faithful to him who appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house** (Hebrews 3:1-2).

Because of all those things—his living as a man in the world, his suffering and being tempted but without sin, and his becoming a merciful and faithful high priest in things toward God—we must recognize him as the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation.

He is God's apostle, having been sent by God to proclaim the good news to us. And he is the high priest of the new holy nation, which is the kingdom of God. An affirmation is a positive declaration, an acknowledgment, a confession. Our affirmation is that we are children of God and brothers with the Son of God. The life of Jesus proved that beyond a doubt, which our enemies can no longer justify denying.

Therefore, since Jesus Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation, it is only good and right and just for us to acknowledge him as our Lord and Savior. For we, who are his holy brothers, and brothers of each other, are companions of a heavenly calling. That heavenly calling is to accept the good news of our salvation by believing in Jesus, repenting of our sins, being immersed in water for the remission of them, and living always in faithful obedience to him.

It was God the Father who appointed his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to be the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation. And Jesus never failed him. He was always faithful to his heavenly Father who appointed him.

The author of Hebrews compared the appointment of Jesus with that of Moses. And he referred to Jehovah's words in this passage: **"If there be a prophet among you, I Jehovah will make myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so. He is faithful in all my house. With him I will speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches, and he has beheld the form of Jehovah"** (Numbers 12:6-8). God appointed Moses to be over his house, Israel.

Moses was faithful in all God's house, meaning the nation of Israel. Israel is referred to as a house one hundred and fifty-two times in the Bible. For example, remember what Jesus said to his apostles when he sent them out to preach the good news: **"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 temple in Jerusalem was also called the house of God, but God considered the entire nation of Israel to be his house because they were his chosen people.

God appointed Jesus his only begotten Son to be over his new house, which is the kingdom of God, the church. And Jesus was always faithful to God who appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house. Moses was always faithful except for one moment of weakness (see Numbers 10). Jesus was always faithful even in the times of his greatest weakness, proving his moral and spiritual superiority over all men.

## Jesus is the most worthy

- **For this man was considered worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as he who built it has more honor than the house. For every house is built by some man, but he who built all things is God** (Hebrews 3:3-4).

Both Moses and Jesus were chosen and appointed to be over the house of God. The house of God was the nation of Israel before Christ, but with Christ it is now the kingdom of the heavens. In comparing Moses and Christ, the author of the book of Hebrews compares a house with its builder. Jesus is the Son of God, and it was through him that all things were made (see John 1:3). Therefore, he is worthy of more glory than Moses or any other man.

Men build houses, but God built all things. He built all things in the sense that he both created the world, making houses possible, and that he continually supplies the energy needed to make them, as well as to do anything else. God is the ultimate builder because he created what houses are made of and he supplies the energy used to make them. Therefore, the psalmist could say, **“Unless Jehovah builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless Jehovah guards the city, the watchman wakes but in vain”** (Psalm 127:1).

Nobody denies that houses are built by men. Yet foolish men deny that things exceedingly more complex than houses are made by anyone. In their ignorance they proudly proclaim that living things just happened. They claim that living things just gradually and spontaneously emerged from the dirt and eventually developed into men.

What would you think of a man who said that houses gradually and spontaneously emerged from the dirt and eventually became all the great skyscrapers of the world? What would you think of a nation that makes laws requiring the children in its schools be taught such an idea? Belief in the evolution of life is even crazier. That is what happens to men when they deny their Creator God. They become fools.

Remember these prophetic words: **“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. 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. 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 1:20-25).

## Christ as a Son over God’s house

- **And Moses was indeed faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of the things that were going to be spoken, but Christ as a Son over his house, whose house we are, if only we keep in possession our confidence and pride of hope, firm until the end** (Hebrews 3:5-6).

The words **“the things that were going to be spoken”** in that passage refer to the laws and commandments that God gave for his people after Moses led them out of Egyptian bondage. And the faithfulness of Moses as God’s servant, with all the mighty signs and wonders he did, proved that God was with him; that was testimony for the people.

The ability of Moses to save them from bondage in Egypt was testimony; it was proof that God was with him, and that they should therefore hearken to the laws he was going to speak to them. God later gave those laws to Moses at mount Sinai. God himself even spoke directly to the people from the mountain.

Moses was a servant in the house of God (Israel), but Christ is God's Son in God's new house (the church). We who belong to Christ are that new house, but **“if only we keep in possession our confidence and pride of hope, firm until the end.”**

Keeping in possession our confidence and pride of hope means to keep our faith in the Son of God. For our faith in him is our confidence and pride of hope. It is our confidence because we believe in the great promises he has given us to become sons of God for eternity. And that is also our pride of hope. We are proud of that great hope Jesus has given us. For there can be no greater hope than to become a son of God for eternity in heaven.

There are many similarities between Moses and Jesus. Both served the house of God, but Moses was a servant of God, while Jesus was the Son of God. Both brought the people a covenant from God, but the one from Moses was a legal system, while the one from Jesus was good news of eternal salvation with a law of liberty. Both used mighty signs and wonders to show they were from God, but the ones Moses used were mostly acts of destruction against the sinful Egyptians. The mighty signs and wonders that Jesus used were mostly miracles of healing for the sick and the afflicted. And unlike Moses, Jesus lived in perfect obedience in the world.

Being the Son of God and having lived his life in perfect obedience to God, Jesus **“was considered worthy of more glory than Moses, by so much as he who built it has more honor than the house.”**

## Do not harden your hearts

- **Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today if ye hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, according to the day of the trial in the wilderness, where your fathers challenged me, tested me, and saw my works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, They are always led astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways. So I swore in my wrath, They will not enter into my rest (Hebrews 3:7-11).**

In that passage the author of Hebrews quotes from the last part of psalm 95, which psalm I give below in its entirety:

**“O come, let us sing to Jehovah. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to him with psalms. For Jehovah is a great God, and a great King above all gods.**

**“In his hand are the deep places of the earth. The heights of the mountains are also his. The sea is his, and he made it. And his hands formed the dry land.**

**“O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before Jehovah our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.**

**“Today, O that ye would hear his voice! Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, as the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers challenged me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long I was grieved with that generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”**

The author of Hebrews says a little farther on that David wrote that psalm. The last words of the psalm are an appeal to not harden your heart. And David quotes the words of Jehovah about how the sons of Israel provoked him, challenged him, proved him, and saw his work. God proved faithful with every test they gave, but they continued to rebel.

Forty long years that generation grieved God. He said they do err in their heart, and have not known his ways. Although he spoke many things to them through Moses, and gave many excellent laws for them, yet they knew not his ways. They did not know them in the sense of not believing and accepting them. An atheist may have knowledge of God in the Bible, but he does not know God because his heart is hardened against him.

Consequently, Jehovah swore in his wrath that those Israelites should not enter into his rest. Every one of that generation (except for the faithful men Joshua and Caleb) perished in the wilderness, never entering into the promise land. They provoked God's wrath because of their continual rebellion against him and against his servant Moses. If you read the history of their wilderness travels you cannot help but see how much they provoked God.

Therefore, heed that warning, and **“if ye hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,”** lest you fail to enter into God's eternal rest in heaven. For this life is like traveling in a wilderness on the way to our promised land above.

The author says those words in that psalm were spoken by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit spoke them by inspiring David who uttered that psalm. Although certainly not all the words in the Bible were spoken by the Holy Spirit, all of the words that are recorded there were inspired by the Holy Spirit. For example, the devil uttered some of the words that are in the Bible, but it was the Holy Spirit that had them recorded there.

### Exhort each other during each day

- **Watch, brothers, lest there will be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in withdrawing from the living God. But exhort each other during each day, while it is called Today, lest any of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin** (Hebrews 3:12-13).

That passage warns against withdrawing from the living God. It speaks of having an evil heart of unbelief, and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Unbelief is not always the result of an evil heart. Paul was at first an unbeliever, but he never had an evil heart. That passage speaks of a brother who withdraws from God because of unbelief. Such a man may not have an evil heart, but he is a betrayer like Judas.

The author warns against that happening to any of us. While we live in this life, which is filled with temptations, trials, and tribulations, we are all vulnerable to developing an evil heart of unbelief. Therefore, the author tells us to exhort each other during each day. We can exhort each other to remain faithful both with our words and with our deeds. Our love for each other, and our faithfulness in living right, can be powerful influences for exhortation.

Notice how the author said we should exhort each other during each day. And he also said we should exhort each other during each day while it is called Today. That means we need

to exhort each other as long as we are living in this evil world. For virtually every day contains some kind of temptation, trial, or tribulation, either around us or within us. Remember what Jesus said about the evils of each day: **“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 6:34).

One of the reasons marriages fail is because husbands and wives fail to exhort each other (with love) during each day. As the body needs nourishment to stay healthy, so also we need encouragement to stay faithful. Indeed, not being encouraged can be very stressful. Therefore, we should exhort each other during each day. That is, of course, whenever we have the opportunities. One of the characteristics of righteous souls is that they are always looking for ways to do good things, just as the wicked are always looking for ways to do evil things.

Exhorting each other helps protect us from being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Few people realize how deceitful sin is. It is deceitful because it offers rewards and pleasures, but the ultimately result is pain and sorrow. For sin is the cause of all pain, sorrow, and death. Sin not only eventually hurts the sinner, but it hurts many innocent people as well. The world scoffs at the idea, but sin is always evil. The world scoffs because the world is deceived and led astray from God and his truth.

## We have become companions of the Christ

- **For we have become companions of the Christ, if only we keep in possession the primacy of the essence, steadfast until the end, while it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion** (Hebrews 3:14-15).

Primacy means being of the highest rank or priority. And essence means the fundamental nature or quality of something. In that passage the author is speaking about life. The essence of life is our relationship with our Creator. That is the most fundamental thing about every man’s life. And the primacy of our relationship with God is our faith and obedience to his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. That must be the highest rank and priority of our lives. That enables us to become companions of the Christ.

And we will be companions of him in heaven with God, but only if our highest priority is to keep in possession our faith and obedience to him—the primacy of the essence—steadfast until the end. That means remaining faithful until the end of our lives in this sinful world. Therefore, we must hearken to the words of the Holy Spirit for us to hear God’s voice and not harden our hearts against him, as did the sons of Israel in their rebellion (which rebellion the author is referring to their constant opposition in the wilderness after departing Egypt).

We hear the words of the Holy Spirit and God’s voice when we hear and read the words of the Bible. For that book is the word of God, and it was written by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

## With whom was God angry

- **For some who heard rebelled, but not all those who came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?** (Hebrews 3:16-17).

The sons of Israel often rebelled against Moses and against God after they fled from bondage in Egypt. But God was merciful and forgiving toward them. However, when they heard the evil report of the men who were sent to spy the promised land, they condemned Moses and planned to return to Egypt. That exhausted God's patience with them. Therefore, God cursed that generation to die in the wilderness. They were to wander in it forty years until every man of that generation died there.

Here is what the record says about it: **“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).

Those Israelites sinned by not believing God, and by rebelling against him. When the author says that not all those who came out of Egypt rebelled, he was speaking of Caleb and Joshua. Of the half million men that were numbered (not counting the women), only those two men eventually entered into the promised land, because they remained faithful.

## Entering into his rest

- **And to whom did he swear were not going to enter into his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief** (Hebrews 3:18-19).

God's rest for those sons of Israel was their promised land. It was rest from the bitter bondage they suffered in Egypt, because the record says, **“And the Egyptians made the sons of Israel to serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard service,**

**in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field, all their service, with which they made them serve with rigor”** (Exodus 1:13-14).

Notice how the author first says those who were *disobedience* were not going to enter into God’s rest for them. Then he says they were not able to enter in because of *unbelief*. He was obviously not contradicting himself, because unbelief and disobedience always go together.

A lack of faith in God always causes a man to sin against him because the natural urges of our flesh are to sin. When a man has no faith in God he has no reason to suppress the lusts of the flesh and obey him. He gives himself over to the sinful pleasures of the world.

Faith in God requires that we sacrifice ourselves for him. Remember what 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). Those who have no faith in him will not do that. Therefore, they will not enter into God’s heavenly rest for us.

### Let us be afraid therefore

- **Let us be afraid therefore, lest, a promise being left behind to enter into his rest, any of you should seem to have come short. For we also are having good news preached, just as also those men, but the word of hearing did not benefit those men, not having been mixed together with faith in those who heard** (Hebrews 4:1-2).

The author now applies that lesson to us. As God promised the ancient Israelites a land of rest, so he has promised a land of rest for us. The author says we should therefore be afraid. We should be afraid lest any of us should seem to have come short. Those ancient sons of Israel came to the very border of the promised land, but they never entered into it.

They came short of entering because they doubted God and rebelled against him. And no man who doubts God and rebels against him will ever enter into the heavenly land that God has promised for us. Therefore, we should all beware and be afraid lest we be left behind.

Moses preached good news to those ancient Israelites. He preached the good news that God was going to lead them to a land of milk and honey, to a land of rest for them. Jesus also preached good news. He preached the very best news, because it promises a glorious heavenly land of eternal rest for us.

However, the good news that Moses brought did not benefit those men. It did not benefit them because it was not mixed together with faith. They heard the good news but they did not believe it. We should, therefore, take warning and not doubt God’s promises to us, lest we too be cursed to die. But that death will be in the eternal wilderness of hell.

The word of God has no value for those who do not hear. That is why it is vital for us to proclaim his word to the world. And we will be judged if we do not take whatever opportunities we have to proclaim it. Nevertheless, hearing the word of God is not enough. It must also be believed.

Doubters and scoffers may read and study the word of God. But its words are useless to them because they do not believe them. The word of God only has value for those who believe in him and what he says. His word must be mixed in our heart with faith in him in order for it to benefit us. And its benefits are beyond measure for those who trust and obey him. Not only in this life but in the one to come.

## God swore in his wrath

- **For those who believe enter into that rest, just as he said, So I swore in my wrath, They will not enter into my rest, although the works occurred from the foundation of the world. For he spoke somewhere about the seventh this way, And God rested during the seventh day from all his works, and in this again, They will not enter into my rest (Hebrews 4:3-5).**

The author of the book of Hebrews is using the story of the ancient sons of Israel and their promised land as an example of not believing God, and failing to enter into the rest he promised them. That land was their rest from Egyptian bondage. Their example is a warning to us of what will happen if we do not believe God's promise of eternal rest in heaven for us. As God swore in his wrath they would not enter into his rest, so too he will swear in his wrath against us, if we do not believe and obey him, that we too will not enter into his rest. For God is impartial.

God's works of the Creation occurred from the foundation of the world. God took six days to create this incomprehensibly immense and complex world. Then on the seventh day he rested, as the record says: **“And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it, because in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made”** (Genesis 2:1-3).

God rested because it was such a colossal task, taking him six days. Many men deny that God labored at all. They have the idea that he simply sat on his throne and uttered a few words. They misunderstand what the scriptures teach.

When the passages say that God spoke that means much more than simply uttering words. It means he extended his energy out from his throne. He extended and expended his energy. That is why he rested the seventh day. The Bible says he rested from all his *works*. That means he worked during those six days, expending energy. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Although God rested the seventh day, he still works. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **“My Father works until now and I work”** (John 5:17). The rest he has promised us is the rest we will have after this world is over. God will also rest then because he is continually laboring to maintain and support this world, even with all kinds of opposition to him. For every sin is opposition to him. But when this world ends all the opposition to him will end. Therefore, he can rest.

And we will rest with him in the new heaven and earth, if we suffer with him in this life. Remember this passage: **“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).

When the Bible says that God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, that does not mean he created a law requiring a sabbath day’s rest at the end of each week. The sabbath day law was for the Israelites only. What the passage means is that God blessed having one day of rest after every six days of labor. And that principle has been accepted by virtually every country in the world because it has proven so effective.

## Entering into the new rest

- **Since therefore it remains for some to enter into it, and those who formerly had good news did not enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, Today, saying in David after so long a time (as it is said), Today if ye will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken about another day after these things** (Hebrews 4:6-8).

Continuing his example of the ancient Israelites, the author quotes again from the psalm of David that speaks of entering into God’s rest (psalm 95). Part of which says, **“For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, O that ye would hear his voice!”** (Psalm 95:7).

Since David says **“Today, O that ye would hear his voice!”** then David was not encouraging the people of God to enter into the rest of the promised land. For Joshua led them into that promised land centuries before David was even born. David, inspired by the Holy Spirit was encouraging the people of God to hear God’s voice so they could enter into another rest, the eternal rest revealed to us by God’s Son Jesus Christ.

As the author of Hebrews concludes, **“For if Joshua had given them rest, he [David] would not have spoken about another day after these things.”** Therefore, it remains for some to enter into that rest, that eternal rest in heaven. However, since those ancient Israelites did not enter into God’ rest for them (their promised land) because of unbelief and disobedience, neither will we enter into God’s rest for us (the new heaven and earth) if we are faithless and disobedient.

## Be diligent to enter into that rest

- **There remains therefore a sabbath for the people of God. For a man who has entered into his rest, he has also rested from his works, as God did from his own. Let us therefore be diligent to enter into that rest, so that not any man may fall by the same example of disobedience** (Hebrews 4:9-11).

A sabbath is a day of rest. God’s sabbath was his time of rest after he created the world. Having rest on the seventh day of the week for the sons of Israel was one of the ten commandments. It says, **“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days thou shall labor, and do all thy work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to Jehovah thy God. Thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant,**

**nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates, for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it”** (Exodus 20:8-11).

That sabbath is not commanded for the disciples of Christ. However, the principle of it is something we should all apply. For every man should be allowed a day of rest after laboring for six days. That is not a law for us, but it is something we should try to apply. Remember however, exceptions are allowed in non-legal systems. And the good news of Christ is a non-legal system.

Regarding the Israelites, other sabbaths were commanded for them besides the one in the ten commandments. One of which was the day of atonement, which Jews now call Yom Kippur. It is not always on the seventh day of the week because the law says, **“In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work, the home-born, or the stranger who sojourns among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you. Ye shall be clean from all your sins before Jehovah. It is a sabbath of solemn rest to you, and ye shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever”** (Leviticus 16:29-31).

The final sabbath for the people of God will be when we enter the new Jerusalem of heaven after this world is over. It will be our ultimate rest after living faithfully to God in this life of tribulation. John spoke of that in his vision of heaven, when he said, **“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 21:2-4).

Therefore, as the author of Hebrews says, we should be diligent to enter into that rest. We should beware lest any man fail to enter into it because of falling into the same example of disobedience. That example was the one of the ancient Israelites who were cursed to die in the wilderness. The Bible is filled with many warning against disobeying God, including many times Jesus warned about it.

### The word of God is living, potent, sharper

- **For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart** (Hebrews 4:12).

The word of God is not just words that are printed or uttered. It is thoughts and ideas that are contained in the hearts and minds of righteous men, having learned it. That is what makes the word of God living. Therefore, it is also potent, which means it has power to perform. It has the power in the hearts and minds of men to cause them to achieve mighty works of righteousness.

It is also sharper, above every two-edged sword, which enables it to pierce **“as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** It can divide the souls of men into the righteous and the unrighteous. That means it can discriminate between those two kinds of men. Its words reveal who belongs to God and who does not.

It also has the power to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. That means it reveals how men think, what they think, and why they think. Not in their details, which vary from man to man and from generation to generation, but in the kinds of thoughts and intentions they have.

For example, James told why we are tempted: **“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God is without temptation of evils, and he himself tempts no man. But each man is tempted by his own lust, being drawn away and enticed. Then the lust having conceived, it gives birth to sin, and after being complete the sin brings forth death”** (James 1:13-15).

James also explained why men make war: **“From where are wars and fightings among you? Is it not from here: from your pleasures warring in your body-parts? Ye desire and do not have, so ye murder. And ye envy and cannot obtain, so ye fight and make war. Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:1-3). Therefore, Jesus prophesied, **“And ye are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars”** (Matthew 24:6).

Those are only two examples of the many things in the Bible that discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Indeed, the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are full of such explanations. That is why I used them when I wrote the book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

The more I study the word of God, the Holy Bible, the more I am awed by its immense wisdom and power. It has the potential to defeat sin and wickedness, to save souls, and to transform the world into a place of truth and righteousness. It has the potential to transform your life into a much better one, as it has done with mine. But that potential will never be realized until you study and apply its words of wisdom.

## Nothing is hidden from God

- **And there is no creature concealed from his presence, but all things are naked and vulnerable to his eyes, before whom is the word to us** (Hebrews 4:13).

God always sees everything. That is one of the reasons why he will always suffer as long as sin exists. He sees everything that is horrible and repugnant, as well as everything that is good and beautiful. And seeing evil things grieves his soul, just as it does every righteous man. Righteousness is like a pleasing aroma to him, but sin is like stink in his nostrils. Therefore, we should do everything we can to combat sin and wickedness, because sin is the ultimate cause of everything that is horrible and repugnant.

God tolerates sin because he is testing our souls. Remember these passages about his long-suffering:

**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).

**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).

The words of the passage in Hebrews that say, “... before whom is the word to us,” probably mean the word of God to us (which is contained in the Bible) is always visible to him, and therefore protected by him. God gradually revealed his word to mankind from the beginning, using many prophets to proclaim it to us. And he used many men to record its words. And with his invisible hand he continues to protect it, although sinful men continually attempt to dilute and pervert it.

The will of God for us is now contained in the words of his Son Jesus Christ. As the author of Hebrews first 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).

After the time of Jesus and his apostles, whom he sent out to preach his good news of our salvation, the word of God became complete. And we now have that complete word of God in the Holy Bible. Therefore, no man who has it available to him can plead ignorance in the day of judgment.

## Jesus our great high priest

- **Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us take hold of the affirmation. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin** (Hebrews 4:14-15).

Remember, since we **“are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation”** (First Peter 2:9), our high priest is the Son of God himself. Being God’s priests we represent him in the world. And Christ being our high priest, he is our mediator with God. The author of Hebrews speaks more about that farther on.

Jesus the Son of God is our great high priest who has passed through the heavens. He alone qualified to be our eternal high priest. And there will never be another one. Consequently, he always sits at the right hand of God in heaven to be our intercessor.

Remember also, an affirmation is a positive declaration, an acknowledgment, a confession. Our affirmation is that we are children of God and brothers with the Son of God. The life of Jesus proved that beyond doubt, which our enemies can no longer deny.

And since the Son of God lived among us as a man in a body of flesh he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He experience hunger and weariness, pain and agony. And as the author says, he **“was tempted in all things in the same way.”** Jesus was not immune nor protected from any temptation. He was tempted in all things in the same way.

However, unlike each of us he never sinned. That is why he deserves to sit at the right hand of God. He proved himself worthy. Although he lived without sin, nevertheless, he is still able to sympathize with our weaknesses, because he knows of our struggles against sin. He experienced them all.

## Let us come near with boldness

- **Let us therefore come near with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may take mercy, and may find grace for timely help** (Hebrews 4:16).

God's throne is called the throne of grace because the apostle John said about Christ, **"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). Being full of grace means that love, kindness, and mercy are a part of him, deep within his heart. Remember, John even said that God was love: **"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"** (First John 4:7-8).

Although we are to fear him, in the sense of knowing the dangers of sinning against him, we can come near his throne of grace with boldness. We can come near to the throne if we love him as the Father that he is to us, and we obey him faithfully. And by coming near to the throne of grace we will take mercy, and find grace for timely help. That means as a loving Father he will forgive our transgressions, and will help us in the things we need.

We come near him in this life in two ways. One way is when we read and study his holy word. That enables us to know him better and to learn more about his will for us. The other way we come near him is with our prayers. That is when we praise him and thank him, and make our supplications to him. That is the way we have of speaking to him, which we are able to do through his Son Jesus Christ.

And after speaking to him, then we must keep alert to how he will answer us. He speaks to us through the words of the Bible, and in countless other ways in things that happen. Remember what the Lord said to Paul in his vision on the road to Damascus: **"Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads"** (Acts 26:14).

The Lord was using different things in Paul's life to goad him away from persecuting him through his attacks on the church. None of those "goads" are ever described, because they would be irrelevant for us. It is our duty to be alert to how the Lord may be goading us to do or not do something.

Nevertheless, we must take great caution in recognizing what he may be communicating to us, because the devil is constantly trying to lead us astray. Things we may think are the Lord's goads may be the devil's instead. We can never assume God is telling us something if it involves anything that is against the teachings of the Bible. I have heard many times people claim that God was speaking to them when they had no proof. They were assuming their imaginations were from him. It is better to be cautious about such assumptions than to be presumptuous and be led astray by the devil.

If you are still convinced of things without proof, then keep your beliefs to yourself, lest you lead others astray. Never say that God personally told you to do this or that, or that he

personally called you to do this of that. All such things are presumptuous. Live your life as you think best (in accordance with his will), but be not proud and boast that God told you personally. He no longer communicates that way. The most you can do is say that you *believe* he informed you or led you to do this or that. And as Paul said, **“The faith thou have, have in relation to thyself before God”** (Romans 14:22). Do not proclaim such beliefs.

### High priests taken from men

- **For every high priest taken from men is appointed for men in things toward God, so that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. Who can be gentle to those who are ignorant and led astray, since he himself is also encompassed with weakness. And because of this he is obligated, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins** (Hebrews 5:1-3).

The author said that every high priest taken from men is appointed for men in things toward God. In the law of Moses every sin required some kind of gift or sacrifice for atonement of sin. It was the duty of the high priest to make those offerings. The guilty man would bring his gift or sacrifice to the altar, but only the high priest was allowed to make the offerings on the altar (the other priests assisted him).

Aaron, the older brother of Moses, was appointed by God to be the first high priest for the children of Israel. And every other high priest was to be a son or descendant of Aaron. Every high priest of the law of Moses was a normal man encompassed with the normal weaknesses and vulnerabilities to sin. Therefore, he too was obligated to offer for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. Having his own requirements for atonement meant he could be gentle with those who were ignorant and led astray. He would not be inclined to be harsh with them, because he too was encompassed with weakness.

Notice however, that the author does not say the high priest could be gentle to all sinners, but to those who are ignorant and led astray. Unrepentant sinners who know better, but still transgress rebelliously and blatantly, do not deserve gentleness. As James said, **“For the judgment is without mercy to him who did no mercy”** (James 2:13).

### Christ became a high priest

- **And not any man takes the honor to himself, but being called by God, just as also Aaron. So also Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest, but it was he who said to him, Thou are my Son, today I have begotten thee. (And just as he says in another, Thou are a priest into the age according to the order of Melchizedek.)** (Hebrews 5:4-6).

Aaron did not appoint himself to be the high priest. He was called by God for that honor and responsibility. Likewise Christ did not glorify himself to become a high priest. Like Aaron, Christ was taken from men to be appointed for men in things toward God.

However, Christ was not a high priest while he was on the earth. Indeed, he could not even be a priest because he was not of the tribe of Levi, from which all priests were required to

be. As the author of Hebrews says about him a little farther on, **“For certainly if he were on earth, he would not even be a priest, there being the priests who offer the gifts according to the law, who serve for an example and shadow of the heavenly things”** (Hebrews 8:4-5).

Christ was chosen and appointed to be the high priest for the kingdom of God because he is the only begotten Son of God. And since he lived in the world as a man, he is able to be gentle with those who are ignorant and led astray. He too was encompassed with weakness, but he never needed to offer atonement for himself because he never sinned. His offering upon the cross was for us.

Christ was not a priest of the law of Moses. Instead, the author of Hebrews said that Christ was a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. And he quoted those words from the psalm: **“Jehovah has sworn, and will not repent. Thou are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”** (Psalm 110:4).

The only other place Melchizedek is mentioned in the Old Testament was in the book of Genesis where it describes who he was. Lot, the son of Abraham’s brother, was taken captive by several kings after Sodom was conquered. The record says about that, **“And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them to Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.**

**“And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and also the women, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh (the same is the King’s Valley).**

**“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine. And he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of all”** (Genesis 14:14-20).

The author of Hebrews also said that Christ was a priest into the age. That means he will always be a priest, a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The order of Melchizedek was probably some kind of heavenly priesthood. I explain more about that when the author says more about Melchizedek a little farther in this book.

## Christ was heard because of his reverence

- **Who, in the days of his flesh, having offered up both prayers and supplications with strong shouting and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and who was heard because of his reverence** (Hebrews 5:7).

Remember the following passage about Jesus when he was praying to God about his trial and crucifixion: **“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). Jesus prayed for God to save him from that terrible ordeal. For Luke also says about him, **“And he was withdrawn from them [his apostles] 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 22:41-42). The cup in those words symbolized his trial and crucifixion.

As the word cup was used figuratively, so also the words about his strong shouting and tears were no doubt figurative. Jesus **“offered up both prayers and supplications with strong shouting and tears,”** which utterances were within his heart and his mind. The strong shouting and tears were mental, not actual. If his prayers and supplications were with strong overt shouting then his apostles would have clearly heard him. For he was only a stone’s throw away from them (see Luke 22:41).

Notice how the author says that Jesus was heard because of his reverence. God is not partial to anyone, not even to his only begotten Son. Jesus was not heard only because he was the Son of God. He was heard because of his reverence. Jesus remained reverent to God, even on the cross. And God heard him by resurrecting him from the dead.

## Having become fully perfected

- **Although being a Son, he learned obedience from the things that he suffered. And having been fully perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek** (Hebrews 5:8-10).

Learning obedience does not mean Jesus was ever disobedient. Jesus experienced for himself what it means to be fully obedient to God even during times of temptation and suffering. That made him fully perfected to become the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him.

If the Son of God had never lived in a body of flesh and suffered from the trials, tribulations, and temptations of this life, then his enemies could always accuse him of being unable to be our judge. They could accuse him of not understanding our suffering, and that made him unable to be a judge of us.

For example, God cannot be tempted, but his offspring can. And so how can God judge us when we sometimes sin if he never experiences temptation? No doubt the devil and his disciples cast accusations like that against God before Jesus came into the world. Remember how Satan challenged Jehovah about his judgment of the man Job.

Jehovah said to Satan that Job was **“a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil”** (Job 1:8). But Satan said that God was wrong. Satan said to Jehovah, **“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? Thou have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce thee to thy face”** (Job 1:9-11).

The things that Jesus suffered taught the Son of God what it was like to be fully obedient. His suffering taught him how difficult obedience can be. And having learned and experienced everything about obedience, including from the things he suffered, he can never be accused of not being qualified to be our judge.

Indeed, his final suffering on the cross made him fully perfected to be the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. It qualified him to become the eternal high priest of all those who obey him. And it gave him the right to redeem all who belong to him, to make us righteous before God.

Because of his perfect obedience, even during his suffering, Jesus was designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Remember, the order of Melchizedek is probably a heavenly priesthood. For Jesus is our heavenly high priest.

## Milk versus solid food

- **About whom, much subject matter from us is also difficult to explain, since ye have become sluggish in hearing. For also men who ought to be teachers because of the time, ye have need again for some man to teach you the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and have become men who have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every man partaking of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is childlike. But solid food is for mature men, those having their sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil** (Hebrews 5:11-14).

The author said that the subject matter from them about Melchizedek was difficult to explain. And that is still true today because there is much controversy about him. Nevertheless, the author rebuked those to whom he was writing (the Hebrews) because they became sluggish in hearing. That means they were slow to learn and understand, which is what made the subject matter difficult to explain.

Those Hebrews even needed some man to teach them the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God. That means they even lacked the basic knowledge of the word of God. They became men who had need of milk and not solid food. And the author explained what he meant by that. He was using the example of milk and solid food to symbolize levels of knowledge and information.

Every man partaking of milk (only) is unskilled in the word of righteousness. Such men are childlike. In other words, those ancient Hebrews were infantile in their knowledge of God's righteousness. That was a severe rebuke to them, but they deserved it because by that time they ought to have been teachers. They had plenty of time and opportunities to learn, but like fools they neglected to develop their minds.

The author also told how we become mature men and skilled in the word of righteousness. He said that in order to partake of the solid food of the oracles of God, we must first have our sensibilities trained through practice for the discernment of both good and evil. That means not everything in the Bible can be easily read and understood by ignorant men.

Sensibilities involve the capability of awareness. Our senses enable us to receive information from which we develop our minds. Sensory information is the most primitive kind. The higher forms of information come from language. And our skill with language must be developed with training. Therefore, our sensibilities of the word of righteousness must be trained through practice before the solid food of the Bible can be digested.

Those who write and promote the so-called easy-to-read Bibles are doing the word of God a great disservice. They demean the oracles of God. They dilute and pervert the solid food of the word of righteousness into milk that is fit only for infants and not for mature men. They deceive people into thinking they can know what the Bible says after reading such perversions.

Dear reader, if you want to partake of the solid food of the word of God, then train your sensibilities through practice. Did you know that the sense organs of children are actually better than ours? Yet their knowledge and understanding are primitive. For our sensibilities must be trained through practice to gain knowledge and understanding. Therefore, continue to read and study a sound translation of the Holy Bible. Practice involves repetition. And repeatedly studying the word of God is the only way to train your sensibilities to discern both good and evil.

Discerning good and evil is the only way to know how to live right and avoid doing wrong. Fools are men who neglect to train their minds to discern good and evil. Therefore, they live foolishly and suffer because of it. Be wise and train your sensibilities through practice for the discernment of both good and evil. Continually read and study the word of righteousness, the word of God, the Holy Bible.

### Moving past the fundamentals

- **Therefore having left the word of the primacy of Christ, let us be brought forward to perfection, not again laying a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of doctrine of immersions, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do, if of course God will permit** (Hebrews 6:1-3).

The author said we should leave the word of the primacy of Christ, and be brought forward to perfection. The word of the primacy of Christ is the foundation of our salvation. And that foundation includes our knowledge of

repentance from dead works  
 faith toward God  
 doctrine of immersions  
 laying on of hands  
 resurrection of the dead  
 eternal judgment.

Our salvation in Christ requires us to repent of our sins, our dead works. It requires us to have faith toward God. It requires us to be immersed in water for the remission of our sins, by which we receive the gift the Holy Spirit. Remember what Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus was resurrected: **“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 literal laying on of hands no longer gives special gifts of the Holy Spirit. Laying on of hands now is figurative, and it symbolizes being received into the fellowship of the kingdom of God, sharing our lives with other disciples of Christ. The resurrection of the dead refers both to the resurrection of Christ, and to our own resurrection after this world is

over. The resurrection of the dead is our great hope of eternal life with God in heaven. And the eternal judgment will follow our resurrection after this world is over.

All of those things are a part of the foundation of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Yet as the author says, we should be brought forward from that foundation to perfection. Of course, that does not mean we should forsake that foundation. It means we should build upon it and not forsake it or leave it barren. We should develop our sensibilities with practice to discern both good and evil so that we can become skilled in the word of righteousness.

The author also said, **“And this we will do, if of course God will permit.”** That means we who are faithful to Christ will be brought forward to perfection. We will be brought forward to perfection if God will permit. If God preserves our lives and our mental faculties then we who are faithful will train our sensibilities through practice for the discernment of both good and evil. We will develop our skill in the word of righteousness. And any man who does not is unfaithful to our Lord.

## The unfaithful

- **For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and who tasted of the heavenly gift, and who became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and who tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age, and who fell away, to restore again to repentance, crucifying to themselves the Son of God, and disgracing him publicly (Hebrews 6:4-6).**

The author here describes what happens when a man does move on from the primacy of Christ and is brought forward to perfection, but then forsakes the Lord and abandons his church. Being brought forward to perfection involves many blessings. The author lists five of them:

- being enlightened
- tasting of the heavenly gift
- becoming partakers of the Holy Spirit
- tasting the good word of God
- (tasting) the powers of the coming age

When we are brought forward to perfection we are enlightened about many things. Jesus taught and demonstrated to us what God is truly like. We learn all about his good news of our salvation, which had been a great mystery. We learn about the nature of the world and why we suffer. And we are enlightened about many other things, both spiritual and material.

We taste the heavenly gift by receiving forgiveness of our sins and the promise of becoming a son of God for eternity in heaven. We become partakers of God’s Holy Spirit, which enters into our hearts to help guide us in our lives (through knowledge of God’s word and by a stronger conscience).

We taste the good word of God, which is now available to us in its completeness in the Holy Bible. The word of God is truly good. It is like a great shining light in this dark world. Regarding the powers of the coming age, we taste of them when we learn about all the mighty miracles, signs, and wonders that Christ and his apostles performed.

The author said that when a man is brought forward to perfection, and receives those many blessings, but then falls away, it is impossible to restore him again to repentance. He is not speaking about times when we stumble and transgress against God. He is speaking about a man who was well developed as a Christian, but then totally rejects Christ and his church.

The author said that such a man actually crucifies to himself the Son of God, and disgraces him publicly. That means the man's heart becomes so hateful against Christ it is like crucifying him. I have heard many hateful words about Christ and his church from men who claimed they were once believers. Their attacks against him are more vicious than ordinary unbelievers. And they proudly and publicly accuse and attempt to discredit him.

The author said that such men cannot be restored again to repentance. They become like God's greatest adversary, Satan himself.

### Good soil and bad soil

- **For the soil that has drunk the rain often coming upon it, and bringing forth vegetation useful for those by whom also it is cultivated, partakes of a blessing from God. But producing thorns and thistles it is unfit and near a curse, the end of which is for burning** (Hebrews 6:7-8).

The author here compares such apostasy with cultivated soil that brings forth thorns and thistles. Farmers who plant seed in the ground and labor over the soil rejoice when it brings forth a bountiful harvest. Such soil is one that partakes of a blessing from God. But the soil that produces thorns and thistles is unfit and near a curse. Its end is for burning. And the end of such apostates is for burning in the lake of fire that burns forever, which is called hell.

Therefore dear brother, beware of following in the steps of Satan and becoming an adversary of Christ. Do not be lured with any reward you may be offered; it will make you unfit for anything but burning in hell when this life is over—you have been warned.

### God does not forget our work

- **But we are persuaded better things about you, beloved, and things that have salvation, even though we speak this way. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the labor of love that ye showed toward his name, having served the sanctified, and who are serving** (Hebrews 6:9-10).

After rebuking them for becoming sluggish in hearing and being childlike in the word of righteousness, the author (and those with him) said they were persuaded better things about them. And he called them beloved even though they (the author and those with him) spoke that way. We can rebuke each other for our failures, but still love each other.

Even though they became sluggish in hearing and childlike in the word of righteousness, they were doing good things. The author mentioned their work, the labor of love they showed toward the name of Christ, and that they not only had served the sanctified, but were still serving them. They had become sluggish in hearing, but they were not slack in

their work of doing good. And he assured them that God was not unrighteous to forget that.

We can also take heart from those words. God is never unrighteous. Even when the Lord chastens us he still loves us, and does not forget the good things we do. And all the more if we do not need chastening he recognizes the good things we do.

Remember what Jesus said about good things we do, even the little ones: **“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 10:41-42).

## Show diligence

- **And we earnestly desire each of you to show the same diligence toward the full assurance of the hope until the end, so that ye may not become lazy, but imitators of those who, through faith and longsuffering, inherit the promises** (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Having mentioned their work, and the labor of love that they showed toward his (God’s) name, having served the sanctified and were serving, the author (and those with him) encouraged them to show the same diligence. Meaning the diligence they had that was toward the full assurance of the hope we have. Which hope is that we will become sons of God for eternity in heaven with him. Therefore, we need to show that same diligence until the end, until the end of our lives in this sinful world.

The author said that by showing the same diligence they would not to become lazy. Like the development of other evil habits, laziness can slowly overcome a man if he begins to be slack in his diligence. And the more slack he becomes the more difficult it is to be diligent. Therefore, we need to continue our diligence until the end.

The author said that we need to be imitators of those who, through faith and longsuffering, inherit the promises. That is another good reason to study the Bible. We can learn about the great men and women of God who were diligent and persevered through the faith they had in God, and were longsuffering in their struggle against things that discourage us. We can follow the lives they lived and use them as models for us to imitate. And not only them, but every faithful soul can serve as a model for us to imitate. The author gives many examples farther in this book when he speaks about faith. Of course, the greatest of all models is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The promises we inherit is that God will always be with us and love us. And when our bodies of flesh perish, he will raise our spirits up to heaven to be with him in the new Jerusalem of the new heavens and earth, where there will be no evil because the will of God will always be done. As Peter said, **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13).

## God's promise to Abraham

- **For God who promised to Abraham, since he had none greater to swear by, swore by himself, saying, Surely indeed, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And this way, having patiently endured, he obtained the promise (Hebrews 6:13-15).**

The first time God made a promise to Abraham was when he commanded him to go to the land he would show him: **“Now Jehovah said to Abram, 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”** (Genesis 12:1-2).

The last time God made that promise to him was after he proved his complete faithfulness by being willing to sacrifice on the altar the life of his only son by his wife Sarah, who was the son of God’s promises to him. At the last moment God stopped him, because that command was only a test of his faith.

And because Abraham proved his complete faith in God even with that very severe test, the Lord 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).

That last time was when God swore his oath of the promise to bless Abraham. God swore to Abraham, but Jesus commanded us against swearing to ourselves, when he said, **“Again, ye have heard that it was said to them in old times, Thou shall 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).

We do not have the right to do whatever we may desire. Only God has that right. But whatever he does is always good and right and just. Another example of what he can do but we cannot is take vengeance. God takes vengeance against evil doing, but he has commanded us (as individuals) against it. Remember what Paul said about that: **“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 12:18-19).

And one way God avenges us is with offices of authority. Paul told of that, when he 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. 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).

In the above passage of Hebrews the author said that God swore his promise to Abraham by himself because he had none greater to swear by. When men swear they commonly invoke something they value very highly to emphasize the truthfulness of what they say. Swearing by God is perhaps the most common practice.

The author says that because God made his promise to Abraham, he believed God, patiently endured, and obtain the promise. And if we too believe God and patiently endure, we too will obtain his promise to us that he will save our souls and make us his sons for eternity in heaven.

Regarding the matter of swearing an oath, there are two kinds of swearing. One kind is to insure that what is said is true. That is the kind required in court testimony. And that is the kind Jesus forbid among us. He forbid it because he wants whatever we say to always be true, and not require an oath for confirmation.

Remember, he said, **“Again, ye have heard that it was said to them in old times, Thou shall 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).

The other kind of swearing is to emphasize that what is said will be done. And that is the kind of oath that Jehovah swore to Abraham. It was to emphasize that what he promised him would be done.

## The immutableness of his promise

- **For men certainly swear by the greater, and of every dispute with them the oath is final for confirmation. By which God, wanting to demonstrate more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutableness of his resolve, confirmed it by an oath** (Hebrews 6:16-17).

Swearing by the greater means invoking a higher authority to enforce the oath. For example, signing a contract is like swearing to an oath. And legal contracts use the laws of the land to enforce the agreement. Signing legal documents is swearing by the greater, meaning the laws of the land. And every dispute settled with an oath is considered final for confirmation. Every agreement signed is considered legally binding. But God having none greater, swore by himself.

The reason why God invoked an oath for his promise to Abraham was to demonstrate more abundantly to the heirs of the promise the immutableness of his resolve. The record of that oath has been a part of the history of the Hebrew people, the heirs of God’s promise to Abraham.

God did not need that oath for himself. He was going to keep his promise even without making an oath. God made that oath as a way of demonstrating more abundantly to the Hebrew people the immutableness of his promise. It was given to strengthen their trust in him and his promise to them.

## We may have strong encouragement

- **So that by two immutable events, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, having fled for refuge to seize the hope being openly displayed** (Hebrews 6:18).

The two immutable events were first his promise to Abraham, and second his oath of confirmation. It is impossible for God to lie about them because they have both been recorded permanently in the record of the holy scriptures. God would never lie about his promise anyway, but he wanted his people to have that guarantee always before them.

And since we the disciples of Christ are the spiritual heirs of God's promise to Abraham, then we can have strong encouragement of his blessing. For his blessing to Abraham, that all the nations of the earth would be blessed, was Christ and his good news of our salvation. As Paul said, **"Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, who is Christ"** (Galatians 3:16).

Thus, we can have strong encouragement because we have fled for refuge in our God. As the psalmist said, **"Hear my cry, O God. Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will call to thee when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou have been a refuge for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will dwell in thy tabernacle forever. I will take refuge in the covert of thy wings"** (Psalm 61:1-4). And Solomon said, **"The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. A righteous man runs into it, and is safe"** (Proverbs 18:10).

And in that refuge we have the hope of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven. And our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ brought that hope to us and made it openly displayed for all men. With the coming of Christ that hope is now loudly proclaimed throughout the earth. And every soul who believes and obeys him has the hope.

## Jesus is our forerunner

- **Which we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and that enters into the interior of the veil, where the forerunner, Jesus, entered for us, having become a high priest into the age according to the order of Melchizedek** (Hebrews 6:19-20).

That hope we have in Christ is an anchor of the soul. It is sure and steadfast because it is bound to our Creator God himself. It is bound in him because when we put our hope in him we become part of the body of Christ. As Paul said about him, **"... we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones"** (Ephesians 5:30).

The author also said that our hope enters into the interior of the veil. The veil he meant was the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place of the tabernacle. Remember, the most holy place symbolized heaven where God is. That means the hope we have enters into heaven itself. Thus, our hope is anchored in heaven not on earth.

Jesus is called the forerunner because he has led the way to eternal life in heaven for us. He was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven, and became a high priest for us into the age, for all time. When Jesus defeated sin and the devil he was appointed by God to be our high priest in heaven.

The author said that the priesthood of Jesus was according to the order of Melchizedek. And he explains more about what that means in the next passage.

## Melchizedek

- **For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, having met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, also blessed him. To whom also Abraham divided a tenth of all. Being actually translated, first, king of righteousness, and then also, king of Salem, which is king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but having been made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually** (Hebrews 7:1-3).

Remember what the book of Genesis said happened after Abraham defeated the marauding kings: **“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine. And he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of all”** (Genesis 14:14-20).

The author of Hebrews says the word Melchizedek translated means **“first, king of righteousness, and then also, king of Salem, which is king of peace.”** A translation is the conversion of the words of one language to those of another. That means the words of one language represent the words of another. Hence, the “translation” in this case means that Melchizedek was a special priest on the earth that represented the heavenly priesthood, which I explain below.

Melchizedek was a representative of the heavenly priesthood because he was **“without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.”** There are no mothers in heaven; hence there are no genealogies in the heavenly world. When the author said that Melchizedek had no beginning of days, he did not mean Melchizedek was like God in the sense of always having existed. He meant that Melchizedek did not begin his life in this world where there are days and nights, life and death.

Melchizedek was not born a man in the world. He was made like the Son of God, existing in heaven before the world began. And as such he remains a priest continually, a priest of the heavenly priesthood. Few people realize that the heavenly world is much greater than our world. And it is filled with a massive civilization of spiritual beings, including all the agents of God.

Why then, should we not expect there to have been a priesthood in heaven to serve that population? The example of Melchizedek tells us there is a heavenly priesthood. It also tells us there are kings in heaven to oversee that civilization. For the author said that Melchizedek was king of righteousness, and also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

There is much mystery about Melchizedek and the order of his priesthood. But we know enough from what the scriptures say that he was not an ordinary man. God sent him from heaven into the world, although not like Jesus who was born of a woman.

The reason God sent Melchizedek may simply have been to contrast the heavenly priesthood with the earthly priesthood of the law. The mission of Melchizedek may have been only to bless Abraham and receive a tithe from him. That action would reveal to us the inferiority of the earthly priesthood of the law. For that seems to be the primary lesson given in this part of the book of Hebrews. It is a much needed lesson for the Hebrews because they still worship the law of Moses (albeit very loosely).

### The inferior is blessed by the superior

- **And notice how great this man was, to whom also the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth out of the best spoils.**
- **Now indeed those of the sons of Levi who receive the priesthood have commandment to collect tithes from the people according to the law, that is, of their brothers, although having come out of the loins of Abraham.**
- **But the man who did not descend from them has received tithes from Abraham, and has blessed the man having the promises. And without all contradiction the inferior is blessed by the superior (Hebrews 7:4-7).**

There were twelve tribes of Israel that descended from Abraham, and the tribe of Levi was one of them. Aaron was a Levite, and he and his sons were appointed to be the high priests. The other sons of the tribe of Levi were to aid the high priests as assistant priests. And the payment for Aaron and the other Levites was taken from the people of the other tribes in the form of a tithe, which was a tenth of their income.

Here is the law about it: **“And Jehovah said to Aaron, Thou shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall thou have any portion among them. I am thy portion and thine inheritance among the sons of Israel. And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the tent of meeting. ...**

**“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Moreover thou shall speak to the Levites, and say to them, When ye take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave offering of it for Jehovah, a tithe of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you, as though it were the grain of the threshing-floor, and as the fullness of the winepress. Thus ye also shall offer a heave offering to Jehovah of all your tithes, which ye receive of the sons of Israel. And from it ye shall give Jehovah’s heave offering to Aaron the priest”** (Numbers 18:20-28).

The Bible record says that Abraham gave a tenth of the best spoils to Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews uses that fact to show how great Melchizedek was. He received a tithe from Abraham the way the Levites received tithes from the sons of Israel. The Levites received a tithe because they were the priestly tribe. And the priests were considered the most exalted of the people. Moreover, they were not given a territory of their own, as were the other tribes.

Since Melchizedek received a tithe from Abraham that means he was greater than Abraham. Moreover, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the man who received the promises of God. And since the inferior is blessed by the superior, that is more proof of the greatness of Melchizedek.

The author of Hebrews used the record of the scriptures to show the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham. And since Jesus is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, that makes him superior to Abraham. Consequently, the new covenant of the good news of Christ is superior to the old covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendents, the people of Israel. And the author is showing how the Old Testament scriptures verify that fact.

### Paying tithes through Abraham

- **And here indeed, men who die receive tithes, but there, he who is testified about that he lives. And, so to speak, Levi also, the man who receives tithes, has paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him** (Hebrews 7:8-10).

The Levitical priests all eventually died because they were like all other men. But Jesus our high priest never dies because he is the Son of God. The author in the above passage uses a special kind of reasoning to show how even the Levites paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Levites received tithes because of their priestly service, and they paid a tithe of that tithe to the high priests (see Numbers 18:25-28). But Aaron and his sons, being the high priests, never paid a tithe.

However, the author is saying that in a sense the Levitical high priests paid tithes through Abraham. They paid the tithe to Melchizedek. The seed of Levi (the genetic code for his body) was in the body of Abraham when Melchizedek met him. Hence, Levi, in his pre-conception form, paid tithes with Abraham because he was in the body of Abraham. And since Jesus is a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, that is another way to show his superiority over the Levitical priesthood.

### The need for another priest

- **If indeed therefore perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people had received the law), what further need is there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?** (Hebrews 7:11).

Moral and spiritual perfection was not obtained through the Levitical priesthood because it was based upon the legal system of Moses. And legal systems always fail because of the

weakness of our flesh. And our failure with legal systems brings us condemnation and death.

Remember how Paul explained those things to the disciples at Rome: **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and of death. 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 8:2-4).

Therefore, there was the need for another priest under a different order, one according to the order of Melchizedek, and not according to the order of Aaron. Remember, the order of Melchizedek is a spiritual one of the world of heaven. It is not of this world. That is one more reason why the good news of Christ is superior to the law of Moses.

### Jesus was not a priest of the law

- **For the priesthood being changed, of necessity a change of law also occurs. For he of whom these things are spoken pertains to another tribe, from which no man has attended to the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose out of Judah, regarding which tribe Moses spoke nothing about the priesthood** (Hebrews 7:12-14).

Our Savior Jesus Christ was of the tribe of Judah and not the tribe of Levi (in the legal sense). Hence, he was not qualified to be a priest under the law of Moses. Consequently, in order for him to be our high priest the legal system of the law of Moses needed to be replaced. Therefore, God sent Jesus to give us a new system. And that system is based upon the spirit and not upon a law, because law brings condemnation.

Notice how the author is careful to show the rationality of the good news of Christ. Our God does not do things capriciously. God introduced Abraham to Melchizedek to show Melchizedek’s superiority to Abraham and to the Levitical priesthood. God gave the law of Moses to show that legal systems always fail to bring spiritual perfection, which means everyone violates them more or less, and that causes our condemnation. God sent his Son Jesus Christ to earn the right to redeem our souls from condemnation and to become our eternal high priest according to a heavenly priesthood.

And he who loves logic and reason will be able to appreciate the superiority of Christ and his good news over the law of Moses. Not only does reason show the superiority of the good news over legal systems, but the application of the good news always brings superior benefits. The application of the good news of Christ, instead of legalities, always brings more truth and righteousness. And as Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

### The power of an indestructible life

- **And it is still far more evident, if according to the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest, who has become, not according to a law of a carnal commandment, but according to the power of an indestructible life.**

**For he testifies, Thou are a priest into the age according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15-17).**

The author continues to reason for the superiority of Christ as our high priest. The priesthood of Christ is not according to a law of a carnal commandment. It is not based upon an earthly legal system. It is not based upon heredity. The priesthood of Christ is according to the power of an indestructible life.

Jesus was appointed by God to be our high priest after his earthly life of perfect obedience to him. Jesus has an indestructible life because he always lives in perfect obedience to God. For sin is what destroys our souls and causes our death, our spiritual death. Remember how Jesus said that sin is what defiles us (see Matthew 15:18-20). Jesus' life (his divine spirit) is indestructible because he never sinned. Therefore, he proved himself worthy to become our high priest.

Jesus was appointed a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which is a heavenly one and an enduring one. And the author quotes again the prophecy of the psalm: **“Jehovah has sworn, and will not repent. Thou are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”** (Psalm 110:4).

## A better hope

- **For indeed there becomes an annulment of a preceding commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing fully perfect), and an introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God (Hebrews 7:18-19).**

The author again says that the law made nothing fully perfect. Consequently, it was annulled. God annulled the law of Moses when the kingdom of God was established and Christ became our high priest. It was annulled because of its weakness and uselessness, being unable to make anything fully perfect.

From before the beginning of time God planned to create the world so that we would have the opportunity to qualify to become his sons for eternity. That is the primary reason the world was created. And the law proved to be too weak to make us righteous before God. It was weak because of the nature of our flesh. Having demonstrated that to us from the record of history, God then sent his Son to introduce a better hope through which we approach God. For only through Christ can we be made fully perfect before God to become his sons for eternity.

## The surety of a better covenant

- **And inasmuch as it is not without an oath. For actually those who become priests are so without an oath, but he with an oath, because of him who says to him, The Lord swore and will not change his mind, Thou are a priest into the age according to the order of Melchizedek. By so much, Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:20-22).**

Again the author contrasts the Levitical priesthood with the priesthood of Christ. The (high) priests of the law of Moses were always to be of the tribe of Levi and a descendant of Aaron. Every man born that way qualified to become a priest (of course, not all of them served in that capacity). No oath was made to confirm their priesthood. It was simply a matter of the law.

However, with Jesus, the Lord swore he would be a priest. And the author again quoted the passage from the psalm that prophesied his priesthood: **“Jehovah has sworn, and will not repent. Thou are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”** (Psalm 110:4).

As God swore his promise to Abraham in order to show the immutableness of it, so also he swore his appointment of Jesus to be a priest into the age according to the order of Melchizedek. God swore and would not change his mind. For the priesthood of Jesus was according to the power of an indestructible life, not according to a law of a carnal commandment.

Therefore, **“By so much, Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant.”** A surety is a guarantee. Jesus is our guarantee because he is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which means he is a heavenly priest that lives continuously. He is our guarantee that we will become sons of God for eternity—as long as we remain faithful to him. And that is a far better covenant than the one God made with the sons of Israel.

## The priesthood of Christ is unchangeable

- **And of course those who have become priests are more, because of being prevented to continue by death, but he, because of his remaining into the age, has the priesthood unchangeable. Whereupon he is able also to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, being always alive in order to intercede on their behalf** (Hebrews 7:23-25).

Again the author shows the superiority of the priesthood of Christ. For the high priests of the law of Moses were many because each one would eventually die. As one high priest died, so he was replaced with a successor. And as he died, he too was replaced. Hence, none of the Levitical priests were able to remain alive.

However, being a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is a priest forever and never dies. Therefore, his priesthood is unchangeable. It will never be annulled the way the Levitical priesthood has been. And that means he is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him.

As long as we remain faithful to him our salvation is complete and guaranteed. For Christ will always be able to intercede on our behalf. He will always be able to reconcile us to the Father, and enable us to become sons of God for eternity.

## A fitting high priest

- **For such a high priest is fitting for us, devout, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and having become higher than the heavens** (Hebrews 7:26).

No other high priest has been completely devout, perfectly innocent, always undefiled, and separated from sinners in the sense of never having sinned. He was made fully perfect by his life of sinlessness, even to the point of death on the cross. Therefore, he is a fitting high priest for us, having become higher than the heavens. He has become higher than the heavens because he now sits at the right hand of God in his throne.

How then, can any man prefer to cling to the annulled legal system of Moses for his hope of salvation? It is a vain hope. It is a dead hope. It is a hopeless hope. It is as useless as the hope the ancient Philistines had in their god Dagan, which kept falling down before the ark of the covenant (see First Samuel 5).

Only men completely blind and led astray would hope in such a dead system as the law of Moses with its Levitical priesthood. And indeed, God has made obedience to the law of Moses now impossible. Moreover, most modern Jews no longer believe in it anyway. But instead of believing in Jesus Christ, they have simply become atheists, denying God himself and becoming even greater fools

### His one sacrificial offering

- **Who has no need to offer up sacrifices each day, as those high priests, first for his own sins, then for those of the people, for this he did, once, when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men high priests who have weakness, but the word of the oath after the law, a Son who has been fully perfected into the age** (Hebrews 7:27-28).

The Levitical priests were required to offer up sacrifices each day. The high priest offered them first for his own sins, and then for those of the people. However, Jesus offered up himself as a one time blood sacrifice for the sins of the people. He was required to make that sacrifice so that he could earn the right to become our Redeemer. His sacrifice was not for himself, because he had no sins. It was for the sins of all who belong to him.

The law of Moses appointed Aaron and his descendents to be the high priests for the people. But they were like all other men in having spiritual weakness and were not able to remain sinless. However, the word of God's oath that came after the law, the oath expressed in the one hundred and tenth psalm, appointed the Son of God, who became fully perfected for all time when he completed his life of perfect obedience in the world.

That is more evidence that the priesthood of Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

### A summation

- **Now a summation about the things being spoken is, we have such a high priest who was seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister of the holy things, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord erected and not man** (Hebrews 8:1-2).

In the previous passages the author gave many evidences of the superiority of the priesthood of Christ. As our high priest Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God

himself, the Majesty in the heavens. And Christ is the minister of everything that is holy, including the heavenly tabernacle, the true one that the Lord erected and not man.

Of course the true tabernacle is not literally a tabernacle, which means a tent; it is the temple or house of God in heaven. For example, this passage mentions the temple of the tabernacle in heaven: **“And after these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened”** (Revelation 15:5).

As members of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, Jesus our high priest is seated at the right hand of God, and is a minister of the holy things. He made the ultimate and final sacrifice for our sins. Now he can intercede for us directly to God. Indeed, he alone has that right. Therefore, all our prayers and petitions to God must go through him.

As Paul said to the Roman Christians, **“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). It is through Christ alone that we have access to God.

### Offering both gifts and sacrifices

- **For every high priest is appointed in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices, whereupon it is necessary for this man also to have something that he may offer** (Hebrews 8:3).

Sacrifices are required for sins because they are recompense to God for our transgressions. Every sin we commit causes some kind of harm, whether we see it or not. Therefore, justice requires that recompense always be made for transgressions. Recompense is repayment and compensation, which are ways to atone for harm that was done or to pay for debts. Every man who loves justice can understand the need for atonement and recompense.

In the law of Moses the high priest was responsible for managing the gifts and offerings made to God for the atonement of sins. Consequently, as our high priest Jesus also needed something to offer. What he offered was the greatest of all possible sacrifices. He offered himself as the one perfect man, thus making him the ultimate sacrifice to God. He gave his very life for our sins. There could be no great atonement to God.

You may wonder why God bothers about such things. The reason is because he must always be just. Remember, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). And knowing that, Satan constantly challenged God’s justice. See the first part of the book of Job for one example. And the book of Revelation says that Satan **“accuses them [mankind] before our God day and night”** (Rev. 12:10). Satan was able to do that before the atoning sacrifice of God’s Son Jesus Christ, which sacrifice redeemed the souls of all who belong to him.

You see, if God were to forgive our sins without atonement, he would need to forgive the sins of all his enemies without atonement, including those of the devil and the demons. For God cannot be partial. Therefore, atonement for sin is always required.

Remember, before Christ came, God’s chosen people were the sons of Israel. They were to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Remember this passage: **“And Moses went**

up to God. And Jehovah called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus thou shalt 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 shalt speak to the sons of Israel”** (Exodus 19:3-6).

God was going to use the sons of Israel to be his priests for the rest of mankind. They were to reconcile the world to God. That is why he only used the Hebrews to write his book, the Holy Bible. And that is why they were the people to offer the gifts and sacrifices for atonement. For reconciliation is only possible when atonement is made. There is no forgiveness without atonement.

The sacrifice of Christ was the perfect one time offering that made atonement for every man who belongs to him. Therefore, forgiveness of sins is only possible through Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus made it possible for God to justly condemn unrepentant sinners, including the devil and the demons, while still justly forgiving the sins of those who love him. Justice was preserved by the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

Do you not see the wisdom of it all? With the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the devil can no longer stand before God and condemn us. Nor can he accuse God of being unjust for saving our souls. The perfect atoning sacrifice of the Son of God both saved our souls and preserved the justice of God. Consequently, the devil was cast out of heaven.

Remember what happened after Jesus made his perfect atoning sacrifice, and ascended up to the throne of God to be our new high priest: **“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).

No man can ever justly accuse God of being unfair.

And now, we the disciples of Christ are God's chosen race, his holy nation, and his royal priesthood. And as his priests it is now our duty to help reconcile the world to God. As 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).

## The law was a shadow

- **For certainly if he were on earth, he would not even be a priest, there being the priests who offer the gifts according to the law, who serve for an example and shadow of the heavenly things (Hebrews 8:4-5).**

As a descendant of the tribe of Judah, Jesus did not qualify to be a priest on the earth. For only the Levites could become priests. And they served according to the law of Moses. Which system, as the author said, was merely **“an example and shadow of the heavenly things.”** God never intended for the law of Moses to be permanent.

Indeed, Moses himself prophesied it would be replaced, when he said to the people, **“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”** (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

That prophet from among the Israelites was Jesus Christ. And the words that God put in his mouth was his good news of our salvation, which established the eternal kingdom of God. A little farther on the author of Hebrews also quotes a prophecy from Jeremiah about the new covenant that God was going to make with Israel.

## A superior ministry

- **Just as Moses who was divinely warned while going to complete the tabernacle, for he says, See thou make all things according to the pattern that was shown thee on the mountain. 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 (Hebrews 8:5-6).**

If we want to be recipients of the superior promises of God, then we must be diligent to obey his every command. We must be as diligent as Moses who was divinely warned to build the tabernacle exactly according to the pattern that God showed him on the mountain. We must live our lives exactly according to the commands that Jesus has shown us in his good news. And those have been permanently recorded for us in the Bible. Remember however, those commands are nothing like the legal system of the law of Moses, because we as disciples of Christ, we are under the law of liberty with God. We live by the few principles of God’s righteousness, not by a host of statutes and ordinances.

The author then speaks of a superior ministry, and a superior covenant based upon superior promises. The first ministry was the Levitical priesthood. The first covenant enacted upon promises was that if the people of Israel would obey God’s laws he would give them a new land, multiply them, and bless them.

The superior ministry is the heavenly priesthood of the Son of God. The superior covenant enacted upon superior promises is that God will forgive our sins, resurrect our souls, and make us his sons for eternity in heaven, if we will believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

Being our eternal high priest, Christ is the mediator of that superior covenant. For it is only through him that any man can become a part of that covenant with God.

### The new covenant prophesied

- **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 (Hebrews 8:7-12).**

That passage contains this prophecy from the book of Jeremiah: **“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).**

Jehovah prophesied a new covenant because he found fault with the first one. Paul wrote about the failure of the first covenant, when he said, **“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).**

The first covenant with the sons of Israel failed because they did not continue in God’s covenant with them. They did not keep their part of the agreement. They kept forsaking

him and his laws. Therefore, the Lord disregarded them. Instead he made a new covenant, not only with the people of Israel, but with all mankind. And that new covenant is the good news of Christ.

And as the prophecy says, God will give his laws into their mind, and will write them on their hearts. The old covenant applied to every Israelite when they were born. It was given to them through biological inheritance. That meant they needed to be taught about Jehovah, and about his laws for them.

In contrast, the new covenant only applies to those who believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God. That means they already know about him when they become a part of his covenant. They do not need to be taught about Christ and his will for us. Indeed, they cannot become his disciples without first knowing him and believing in him. Attempting to make infants and young children into Christians is a vain effort. They have a different relationship with God before they have the ability to understand and choose Christ. I explain more about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

As disciples of Christ and members of the kingdom of God with its new covenant, God will be merciful to our iniquities. He will not condemn us as we deserve because Jesus has redeemed us with his atoning sacrifice. When the passage says that God will no longer remember our sins and lawlessness, he is not speaking literally, as some foolish preachers claim.

God will not remember in the sense that he will not bring them up against us, but only as long as we continue faithful to Christ. God certainly will remember the past sins and lawlessness of those who fall away from Christ and become apostate.

## The first is old and obsolete

- **In saying, New, he has made the first old. And what is becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance** (Hebrews 8:13).

With the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven the law of Moses was abolished. God made that covenant old and obsolete. However, because the Jews rejected Christ, and retained the law of Moses as the law of their land, it did not immediately disappear. That means the citizens in Israel were legally obligated to continue obeying the laws of Moses, at least those that the Jews enforced.

For example, if the law in America says that I must swear to my court testimony then I am obligated. I can still obey Christ's command not to swear to what we say to each other, but I must swear to things in the legal system of the country. God recognizes that and he allows it.

In the same way God recognized that the law of Moses did not disappear in the land of Israel. Therefore, he allowed the Jewish Christians to continue with those practices. Thus, they continued to observe things like circumcision and the sabbath day, and they continued some of the practices of the temple. Remember, Paul himself supported obedience to the laws of vows long after he became an apostle of Christ (see Acts 21:18-26).

However, after giving the Jews forty years to hearken to Christ and accept his good news, God sent the Roman army to destroy Israel and its temple, and scatter the remnant of the

Jews among other nations. That destruction made the law of Moses completely disappear because it is now impossible for any man to obey it. And it will always be impossible.

The stiff necked and stubborn Jews who still refused Christ created a perverse hybrid religion called Judaism. They chose a few scraps of the laws of Moses and added a host of others of their own invention to make that religion. But God does not accept such perversions, any more than he accepts the perversions of such religions as that of Roman Catholicism or Mormonism.

### The tabernacle described

- **Now indeed therefore the first had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared, the first in which was also the lampstand, and the table, and the presentation of the loaves, which is called the Holy place.**
- **And behind the second curtain, the tabernacle called the Holy of holies, having a golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid entirely in gold, in which was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. And above it were cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of forgiveness. About which things it is not now to speak in detail (Hebrews 9:1-5).**

The first earthly sanctuary was the tabernacle. That was later replaced by a temple built in Jerusalem. The record of how Jehovah commanded the tabernacle to be built is given in Exodus 25-27. The description of the actual construction is given in Exodus 36-38. The description of the construction of the temple is given in First Kings 6 and in Second Chronicles 3. God also gave detailed instructions about the altar of burnt offering with its various utensils, which the above passage in Hebrews does not mention. Most of the ordinances of divine service for the first covenant are in the book of Leviticus.

How the temple was to be built is told in this passage: **“Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch of the temple, and of the houses of it, and of the treasuries of it, and of the upper rooms of it, and of the inner chambers of it, and of the place of the mercy-seat, and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, for the courts of the house of Jehovah, and for all the chambers round about, for the treasuries of the house of God, and for the treasuries of the dedicated things, also for the divisions of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of Jehovah, and for all the vessels of service in the house of Jehovah, of gold by weight for the vessels of gold, for all vessels of every kind of service; of silver for all the vessels of silver by weight, for all vessels of every kind of service, by weight also for the lampstands of gold, and for the lamps of it, of gold, by weight for every lampstand and for the lamps of it, and for the lampstands of silver, silver by weight for every lampstand and for the lamps of it, according to the use of every lampstand, and the gold by weight for the tables of showbread, for every table, and silver for the tables of silver, and the flesh-hooks, and the basins, and the cups, of pure gold, and for the golden bowls by weight for every bowl, and for the silver bowls by weight for every bowl, and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight, and gold for the pattern of the**

**chariot, even the cherubim that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of Jehovah.**

**“All this, David said, I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah, even all the works of this pattern”** (First Chronicles 28:11-19).

David wanted to build the temple, but God would not allow him. Therefore, it was build by his son Solomon after he became the king. Notice however, that God did give David the instructions about how to build the temple. For the passage says, **“All this, David said, I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah, even all the works of this pattern.”**

Exactly how David received those instruction is not told. The record simply says he received them in writing from the hand of Jehovah. That probably means God spoke to a prophet who wrote the pattern down to be given to David. For there is no record that God ever spoke to David directly.

## The two parts of the tabernacle

- **And these things thus having been prepared, the priests indeed enter into the first part of the tabernacle continually, accomplishing the services. But into the second part, the high priest alone, once a year, not without blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people** (Hebrews 9:6-7).

The first part of the tabernacle was called the holy place. The inner part was called the most holy place or the holy of holies. The priests entered into the first part daily to light the oil in the lampstand and to burn the incense. The inner part contained the ark of the covenant. Only the high priest was allowed in there, and that was only on the day of atonement, which occurred only one day each year.

Notice how the passage says the blood sacrifices were both for the high priest and for the unintentional sins of the people. The law of Moses allowed atonement for sins, but not without sacrifices. Every sin committed deliberately required some kind of animal sacrifice in order to receive atonement. However, as with all of us, the people would sometimes commit unintentional sins. Nevertheless, when those offenses became known then sacrifices were also required for atonement of them.

The first time we sin we become captive in the law of sin. That means all of us are going to sin even unintentionally (all except Christ who never became captive in the law of sin). Paul spoke of those unintentional sins, when he said, **“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 7:22-23).

The sins that remained unknown (unintentional) were atoned by the sacrifices made by the high priest on the day of atonement. The day of atonement was God’s way of purifying the people once each year. All the people needed to do was to fast that day. Remember however, willful sins always required their own sacrifices for atonement.

But now with the atoning sacrifice of Christ none of those things are necessary. indeed, God no longer accepts them.

### A figure for the present time

- **This signifying from the Holy Spirit, the way into the holy things is not yet to be made known while the first tabernacle still has standing. Which is a figure for the present time, according to which both gifts and sacrifices are offered that are not able to make the man worshiping fully perfect in respect to conscience, only in foods and drinks and various washings: carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation** (Hebrews 9:8-10).

The first tabernacle was a figure of this world. The tabernacle was enclosed in a small courtyard (150 feet by 75 feet) with a seven foot high curtain wall. Outside the courtyard symbolized the Gentile nations. Inside the courtyard symbolized God's chosen people Israel. The holy place of the tabernacle symbolized the service of the priesthood. The most holy place symbolized the way to heaven. It was the place where atonement for sins was made by the high priest once a year.

However, that atonement was only temporary, and unable to make those who were offering the sacrifices fully perfect in conscience. All those sacrifices did was to obey the commandments of the law of Moses (the carnal ordinances) until the time of reformation. That reformation was the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God.

The way into the eternal holy things of heaven was not to be made known while the law of Moses was still in effect. It was not until after Christ ascended into heaven to become our new high priest abolishing the law of Moses that Peter opened the doors to the church with his first sermon on the day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension.

He showed the way into the eternal holy things of heaven, when he said 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. 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).

### Christ found eternal redemption

- **But Christ, having arrived a high priest of the good things that are coming, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered in once into the holy things, having found eternal redemption** (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Christ arrived in heaven a high priest of the good things that are coming for us in the new heaven and earth. The greater and more perfect tabernacle not of this creation is the new Jerusalem of the new heaven and earth. That is where we will enjoy the good things that are coming after this world is over.

Christ arrived a high priest of those good things that are coming, not through the blood of animal sacrifices, but through his own blood. With that perfect offering he entered into the holy things, having found eternal redemption. That perfect offering was the climax of his life of perfect obedience to God the Father. And God rewarded his perfect obedience by giving him the right to redeem us from our sins permanently. Jesus gives us eternal redemption—as long as we remain faithful to him.

Christ purchased us with his own blood. Remember what Paul said about our being bought with a price: **“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).

### Christ offered himself unblemished

- **For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling those who were defiled, sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself unblemished to God, will cleanse your conscience from dead works in order to serve a living God?** (Hebrews 9:13-14).

The focus of the law of Moses was on external behavior. And that was also true of the animal sacrifices for atonement of sin. Nothing in the law said anything about a man repenting and changing his heart. Atonement for sin was simply a matter of engaging in the necessary rituals. Therefore, those animal sacrifices only purified a man’s flesh, his earthly life. In contrast, Christ offered his own blood as an atoning sacrifice for our souls, our divine spirits.

Before Christ came the sons of Israel were **“a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”** (Exodus 19:6). It was only through them that sins could be atoned. And that atonement was with the animal sacrifices offered through the levitical priesthood. However, Jesus did not offer himself as a blood sacrifice to atone for our sin through the levitical priesthood.

Jesus offered himself as a blood sacrifice to atone for our sins directly **“through the eternal Spirit.”** There is only one truly eternal Spirit, only one that has always existed, and that is the Spirit of God the Father. And that eternal Spirit is not the Holy Spirit of God; it is the eternal Spirit of God himself. The Son of God has not always existed, and neither has the Holy Spirit always existed. Only God the Father has always existed, and that means only his Spirit is fully eternal.

Regarding God and his Spirit, remember, he has both a spirit and a body. The body of God always resides in his throne, that great heavenly command center. The body of God always resides there so that he can maintain his oversight of heaven and earth. However, his Spirit radiates out from his throne. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Jesus offered himself unblemished to God through the eternal Spirit, the very Spirit of God himself. For it was God the Father who commanded Jesus to offer his own blood upon the cross so that he could cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve a living

God. Therefore, it was through the eternal Spirit that enabled our spirits to be cleansed from sin to serve the eternal Spirit.

The animal sacrifices did not cleanse the consciences of men. Only the sacrifice of Christ can cleanse our consciences. They are cleansed when we are begotten again through the Holy Spirit. And that happens when we repent of our sins and are immersed in water for the remission of them.

Paul wrote about that when he 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), and, **“But ye did not so learn the Christ, if indeed ye heard him, and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, for you to put off the old man according to your former conduct, the man who is corrupt according to the desires of deceitfulness, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man according to God, the man who was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth”** (Ephesians 4:20-24).

## Mediator of a new covenant

- **And because of this he is mediator of a new covenant, so that a death having occurred for the redemption of the transgressions against the first covenant, those who are called might take the promise of the eternal inheritance** (Hebrews 9:15).

Because of the superior atoning blood of Christ he is mediator of a new covenant. The new covenant is the good news of Christ, which promises an eternal inheritance to all who believe and obey him. For only his death—his atoning sacrifice—was able to redeem the transgressions committed against the first covenant, the law of Moses.

Remember, the author told how atonement was never complete through the animal sacrifices. For he said about the levitical priesthood, **“... according to which both gifts and sacrifices are offered that are not able to make the man worshiping fully perfect in respect to conscience, only in foods and drinks and various washings: carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation”** (Hebrews 9:9-10).

Only the blood of Christ was able to redeem mankind of their sins. The animal sacrifices of the levitical priesthood only provided temporary atonement **“until a time of reformation.”** That time of reformation is the new covenant of the good news of Christ. Only he can make us fully perfect in respect of our conscience toward God.

Only his blood can cleanse us of our guilt completely, as the apostle John said: **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from every sin”** (First John 1:7).

## A covenant is effective with the dead

- **For where a covenant is, a necessity is to present the death of the man who made the covenant. For a covenant is effective with the dead, since it is**

**never enforced while the man who made the covenant lives** (Hebrews 9:16-17).

The meaning of the word covenant in that passage is more like a man's last will and testament. Therefore, the above passage would read, "For where a will is, a necessity is to present the death of the man who made the will. For a will is effective with the dead, since it is never enforced while the man who made the will lives."

The new covenant is like a last will and testament because it involves an inheritance resulting from the death of Christ who made it. The new covenant is the good news of Christ that promises eternal life. And because of his sacrificial death we can inherit that magnificent promise. Our inheritance of eternal life is the completion of his new covenant with us.

Remember however, a covenant always involves more than one. It is an agreement based upon certain terms. And our part of the new covenant is that we always be faithful and true to Christ. Those who live otherwise, violate the terms of his new covenant with us, and they will lose their part of the inheritance.

## Blood

- **Whereupon neither has the first been dedicated without blood. For of every commandment according to law that was spoken by Moses to all the people, after taking the blood of the calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, he sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God made for you. And likewise he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the service** (Hebrews 9:18-21).

The Bible record says that immediately after God himself spoke the ten commandments to the people from mount Sinai, the people pleaded for Moses to tell them the laws instead of God directly: "**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. And Moses said to the people, Fear not, for God has come to prove you, and that his fear may be before you, that ye not sin. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was**" (Exodus 20:18-21).

Not long afterward Moses returned and spoke the laws that God told him. The record says, "**And Moses came and told the people all the words of Jehovah, and all the ordinances. And all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which Jehovah has spoken will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of Jehovah, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar below the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.**

**"And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to Jehovah. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the**

covenant, and read in the audience of the people. And they said, **All that Jehovah has spoken will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that Jehovah has made with you concerning all these words**" (Exodus 24:3-8).

Twice the people said to Moses, "**All the words which Jehovah has spoken will we do.**" And yet within a few weeks afterward, while Moses was on the mountain with God, they made an idol of a calf for themselves and began to worship it (see Exodus 32). The blood of those animal sacrifices made for them did not cleanse their consciences from dead works.

Notice how the record says that after the people heard the commandments, the law of Moses was dedicated with those blood sacrifices. Later after the tabernacle and all of the vessels of the service were assembled, the book of Hebrews says they too were dedicated with blood sacrifices.

## No remission without bloodshed

- **And almost all things, according to the law, are cleansed with blood, and remission does not occur without bloodshed** (Hebrews 9:22).

The penalty of sin has always been death. Remember, it was only one sin that condemned Adam to die. This sinful world cannot understand why sin should be punished so harshly. The reason is because the world has such perverted values. They make light of sin, but sin is the cause of all sorrow and death. The world is blind to how deadly sin is. But a strong and healthy world without sorrow and death cannot exist with sin. Therefore, the guilty must die.

In the law of Moses God allowed the blood sacrifices of animals to substitute for the blood of the sinners, except for capital crimes. The requirement of bloodshed for remission of sin was one way to show how deadly sin is. Nevertheless, for eternal salvation from our sins only the shed blood of Christ could atone for them. Only the sacrifice of himself was sufficient to save our souls. All the animals in the world could not compare with the saving power of his sacrifice.

The shed blood of the innocent man Jesus Christ paid the price for us. He was not punished for us; God would never allow such a thing. Instead, his life of perfect obedience to God earned him the right to pay that price, thus redeeming us from the death we deserved.

## Cleansed with sacrifices

- **Indeed therefore, a necessity was for the models of the things in the heavens themselves to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things with better sacrifices than these. For the Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, representative of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us** (Hebrews 9:23-24).

It was necessary for the book of the law, the people, the tabernacle, the altar, and all the vessels of the service to be cleansed (in the ritual sense) with the sprinkling of the blood of

sacrifices. Only after being cleansed that way could the priests enter into the tabernacle area and use those things to make atonement for the sins of the people. Remember however, that atonement was only temporary **“until a time of reformation.”** And that reformation was the good news of Christ.

In the same kind of way, only the sacrifice of Christ enabled him to enter into heaven to appear in the presence of God to make permanent atonement for our sins. Before becoming a disciple of Christ every man is guilty of his sins and condemned. When a man believes in Christ, repents of his sins, and is immersed in water for the remission of them, then Christ will redeem him of his condemnation.

Christ will pay for his guilt and cleanse his spirit with the atoning power he was given because of the blood he shed upon the cross. No man is redeemed of condemnation until he becomes a faithful disciple of Christ. And no man remains redeemed unless he continues faithful to him.

## Christ came to annul sin

- **And not so that he might offer himself often, as the high priest enters into the holy things each year with blood by another, since it would be necessary for him to suffer often, from the foundation of the world. But now once, at the end of the ages, he was made known for an annulment of sin by the sacrifice of himself** (Hebrews 9:25-26).

Because those animal sacrifices only provided temporary atonement, it was necessary for the high priest to enter into the most holy place on the day of atonement each year with more blood of the sacrifices. However, the one time blood sacrifice of Christ was enough to provide atonement and annul sins permanently.

His life of perfect obedience to God, and his sacrifice on the cross paid the price permanently for all who belong to him. His sacrifice made the annulment of our guilt an act of justice. The annulment of our guilt is justice because Jesus earned the right to redeem us. He earned it from God by his perfect obedience to him, even to the shedding of his blood on the cross.

Notice the expression “the end of the ages.” That simply means the age or era of Christ is the last of the ages. We are now living in the age of Christ, which will last until the end of the world. The age of Christ is the end of the ages, meaning the last one.

## First death then judgment

- **And inasmuch as it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, judgment, so also the Christ, having been offered once in order to take up the sins of many, will appear a second time, independent of sin, to those waiting for him for salvation** (Hebrews 9:27-28).

The theory of reincarnation is a false one. It was invented by the disciples of the devil to give sinners false hope. We only live in this world once. And after that we are judged by

how we lived. Let no man deceive you. There will never be another chance for redemption after this life is over.

Likewise, Christ will never return to live in this world again. Many false teachers proclaim the return of Christ to reign upon the earth. That too gives false hope. As the author of Hebrews said, when Christ appears a second time it will be to those who are waiting for him for our final salvation. His appearance will not be like the first time to forgive sin. In fact, he will not even set foot on the earth, but will appear in the clouds of the air.

Remember what Paul said about it: **“But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who are asleep, so that ye may not grieve, as also the others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and arose, so also those who became asleep through Jesus, God will bring with him.**

**“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 4:13-18).

### Animal sacrifices cannot take away sins

- **For the law having a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the same substance of the events, with the same sacrifices that are offered continually each year, they are never able to fully perfect those who are approaching. Otherwise would they not have ceased being offered, because of those who worship, once having been cleansed, to have no further conscience of sins? But in them is a reminder of sins each year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins** (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Unlike the animal sacrifices of the law, the atoning sacrifice of Christ permanently cleansed us of sin. His sacrifice made us fully righteous and fully perfect before God. Now, although we who belong to Christ may occasionally transgress against him, those offenses are not held against us. They are not considered condemning sins.

For when we became a disciple of Christ, and were redeemed from condemnation, God then adopted us to be his children. As Paul said, **“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).

Our heavenly Father no more condemns us for our occasional offenses than a righteous father in the world condemns his children for their occasional offenses. Therefore, we can have no further conscience of sins. Our occasional offenses are not condemning sins to make our conscience guilty. Christ redeemed us from condemnation permanently—as

long as we continue to belong to him by remaining faithful. For it is only after our body perishes that our salvation is complete.

The law was merely a shadow of those good things that Christ brought for us, not the substance of them. Those animal sacrifices were offered continually because they were never able to fully perfect those who were approaching God. They were only a temporary atonement for sin.

Those animal sacrifices were a reminder that sins needed to be continually atoned. They were continually made because they could not permanently atone for sin. As the author of Hebrews said, **“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”** Those sacrifices only postponed condemnation for sin. In contrast, the sacrifice of Christ redeemed his faithful disciples from condemnation permanently.

### Sacrifice and offerings not desired

- **Therefore when he comes into the world, he says, Sacrifice and offering thou did not desire, but thou prepared for me a body. In whole burnt offerings and for sin thou were not pleased. Then I said, Lo, I come (in the volume of a book it is written about me) to do thy will, O God, saying above, Sacrifice and offering and whole burnt offerings and for sin thou did not desire, nor were thou pleased with things that are offered according to the law. Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God (Hebrews 10:5-9).**

Notice how the author contrasts the animal sacrifices required by the law, with simply doing the will of God. And he uses words from one of the psalms that make that contrast. The psalm says, **“Sacrifice and offering thou did not desire, but a body thou have prepared for me. Whole burnt offering and sacrifice for sin thou did not require. Then I said, Lo, I have come. In the volume of a book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God”** (Psalm 40:6-8).

What God really wants is for us to sacrifice our selfish lives and obey him. It was not animal sacrifices for sin that God desired of his people. It was not things that were offered according to the law that pleased him. Micah expressed it very well, when he said, **“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).

The truth is that all those statutes and ordinances requiring the animal sacrifices were given to punish the people because of their continual rebellion. In the book of Ezekiel, when Jehovah was describing his different punishments for the sons of Israel, he said, **“Moreover I also gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they will not live. And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass**

**through the fire all that opens the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 20:25-26).

God gave them so many commandments about animal sacrifices, with so much detail about them, that they were never fully kept. And that brought them condemnation. The reference in the passage in Ezekiel to passing through the fire all that opens the womb refers to the laws about sacrificing the first born of every clean animal. Those laws were the means God used to pollute them and make them desolate, because he knew they would be disobeyed. Thus, those laws brought them death instead of life. I explain those things much more in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

When the psalmist said **“In the volume of a book it is written about me,”** he was prophesying about the Christ. The psalmist said, **“Lo, I have come. I delight to do thy will, O my God.”** However, the author of Hebrews said, **“Lo, I come to do thy will, O God,”** which was the gist of the passage. Such variations in things that are quoted are common in the Bible. Nevertheless, translators themselves have no right to make such changes or paraphrases because they are not divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit as were the authors of the Bible.

The point of those words is that Christ was prophesied to come and do the will of God. For only he was capable of doing God’s will perfectly. Only he had the strength of his spirit and character to be perfectly obedient. And that proved his moral and spiritual superiority over all others: past, present, and future. It proved the justice of God making him King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 17:14).

Nevertheless dear reader, although those words were about Christ, what the Lord wants is for us all to say, **“Lo, I come to do they will, O God.”** God wants us to follow in the steps of his Son Jesus Christ while we are on the earth so that we can live with him in heaven as worthy sons of God.

## Sanctified through the one time offering

- **He takes away the first, so that he may establish the second. By which will we are sanctified through the one time offering of the body of Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 10:9-10).

God took away the first covenant, the old covenant of the law with its animal sacrifices. He took that one away so that he could establish the second covenant, the new covenant of the good news of Christ. It is by the will of the new covenant that we are sanctified before God. We are sanctified through the one time offering of the body of Jesus Christ.

Our sanctification was made possible when Jesus became our Redeemer. His one time sacrifice of himself on the cross culminated his life of perfect obedience to God. And in payment for his service, God gave him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. That made us righteous before God; it sanctified us; it made us qualified to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

Animal sacrifices could never do it. That is why God took away the first and established the second. That is why he took away the law of Moses and established the good news of

Christ. That is why the sons of Israel are no longer God's chosen people. We who belong to Christ in the kingdom of God are now his chosen people

## His one offering fully perfected us

- **And indeed every priest stands daily serving and offering the same sacrifices often, which can never take away sins. But this man, having offered one sacrifice on behalf of sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting henceforth until his enemies are placed a footstool of his feet. For by one offering he has fully perfected forever those being sanctified** (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Every priest of the law of Moses served daily in the tabernacle area, and offered the animal sacrifices. Those things could never take away sins. Those sacrifices were required to atone for sin, but that atonement was only temporarily. That is why those offerings and sacrifices continued daily.

Here was the law for the daily offerings: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Command the sons of Israel, and say to them, My oblation, my food for my offerings made by fire, of a sweet savor to me, ye shall observe to offer to me in their due season.**

**“And thou shall say to them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer to Jehovah: he-lambs a year old without blemish, two day by day, for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb thou shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb thou shall offer at evening, and the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a meal offering, mingled with the fourth part of a hin of beaten oil.**

**“It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained on mount Sinai for a sweet savor, an offering made by fire to Jehovah. And the drink offering of it shall be the fourth part of a hin for the one lamb. In the holy place thou shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to Jehovah. And the other lamb thou shall offer at evening. As the meal offering of the morning, and as the drink offering of it, thou shall offer it, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor to Jehovah”** (Numbers 28:1-8).

In contrast, Jesus offered one sacrifice on behalf of sins forever. His was the perfect sacrifice that fully perfected forever those being sanctified. His sacrifice also qualified him to sit down at the right hand of God. For it proved his moral and spiritual superiority. His sacrifice also defeated his enemies. Remember, Satan and his agents were cast out of heaven only after Jesus ascended back to the throne of God (see Revelation 12:1-12).

Although God's enemies were defeated, they are not yet all in bondage. God is allowing Satan and his disciples to continue on the earth so other men can qualify to become God's sons for eternity. For the book of Revelation says, **“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).

Every disciple is killed in a figurative sense when he loses his life for the sake of Christ. For Jesus said, **“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it”** (Matthew 10:39). But when this world is over, Satan and his disciples will all be placed a footstool of the feet of Christ. That means all of God’s enemies will be in complete subjection to him. But that time is yet to come. Jesus is still waiting for that to happen, and we are waiting with him.

## Prophecy of the new covenant

- **And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, after indeed foretelling, This is the covenant that I will ordain with them after those days, says the Lord, giving my laws on their hearts, and on their minds I will write them, and, Their sins and their lawlessness I will, no, not further remember** (Hebrews 10:15-17).

The Holy Spirit testifies of the new covenant of Christ through the divinely inspired words recorded in the book of Jeremiah: **“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, **“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”** (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

The middle part of that passage in Jeremiah (which was not quoted in this book of Hebrews) says, **“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.”** That part of the prophecy was about how the people of the new covenant would be different. Those things were less relevant to what the author is teaching about Jehovah planning to give a new covenant. Consequently, he omitted those words.

The point the author of Hebrews is making is that the prophet Jeremiah told the people to expect a new covenant from God. That prophecy was testimony from the Holy Spirit because the things Jeremiah said that are recorded in the Bible were divinely inspired.

Remember, that prophecy was quoted earlier in the book of Hebrews (see Hebrews 8:12). You can read more of what I said about it in my comments there.

## No more offering for sin

- **Now where there is remission of these, there is no more offering for sin** (Hebrews 10:18).

The last thing Jehovah said in that prophecy of Jeremiah was that he would forgive iniquity and remember the sins no more. In other words, he would remit them. Hence, the author of Hebrews says in the above passage that where there is remission of these (the iniquities and sins), there is no more offering for sin. Why make offerings for sin when

they are already remitted? Jesus made remission of them once and for all by his great sacrifice.

## A new and living way

- **Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entrance into the holy things by the blood of Jesus, which he inaugurated for us, a new and living way through the curtain, that is, his flesh, and a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed in pure water** (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Having been fully perfected in spirit by the atoning sacrifice of the blood of Christ, we now have boldness for entrance into the holy things, which Christ inaugurated for us. Those holy things refer to heaven where Christ is now. Remember how the author of Hebrews spoke of that, when he said, **“But Christ, having arrived a high priest of the good things that are coming, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered in once into the holy things, having found eternal redemption”** (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Jesus inaugurated for us that greater and more perfect tabernacle in heaven. Therefore, we have boldness for entrance. Those holy things in heaven are a new and living way for us about which Peter said that righteousness dwells: **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13). There will be no sin and wickedness, and no sorrow and death there. For it is a new and living way.

And our entrance into the holy things for that new and living way is through the curtain of the flesh of Christ. That curtain symbolizes the separation of the world from the holy things of heaven. And it is only through that curtain that we can enter into those holy things. Our salvation and adoption by God is only through the sacrificed flesh of Christ.

It was the flesh of Christ that enabled him to become our Redeemer. For it was only by living as a man in the world that he could prove his moral and spiritual superiority. He proved himself by living a life of perfect obedience to God, even to the point of the shedding of his blood, which was done unjustly and cruelly by sinful men.

And as a result he earned the right from God to redeem all who belong to him. And he became a great high priest over the house of God, the kingdom of God, which upon the earth is the church. Hence, our entrance into the new and living way of the holy things in heaven is through the sacrifice of his flesh, which the author symbolized as a curtain separating those who belong to him from those who do not.

And so as disciples of Christ we have boldness for entrance into the holy things of heaven. We also have a great high priest over the house of God, the eternal house of the kingdom of the heavens. Of which we all belong when we believe and obey Christ.

Consequently, we should **“approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed in pure water.”** A true

heart means having genuine love for God and Christ, and a genuine desire for truth and righteousness. Full assurance of faith is our complete trust and commitment to Jesus Christ and his good news.

We have our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of Christ, instead of being sprinkled with the blood of animal sacrifices. Remember, the sprinkling of blood was a ritual of the law that was for purification. Our consciences have been purified by the figurative sprinkling of the blood of Christ.

Similarly, our bodies have been figuratively washed in pure water, the symbolic pure water used when we are immersed in water for the remission of our sins after we repent of them because of our faith in Christ. When that happens we are made holy and righteous before God. That happens because God forgives all our sins through the redemptive powers of Christ.

Hence, we have boldness for entrance into the holy things of heaven. Therefore, let us approach God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. For he has adopted us to become his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

## Hold firm the affirmation of the hope

- **Let us hold firm the affirmation of the hope unwavering, for he who promised is faithful** (Hebrews 10:23).

Having boldness for entrance into the holy things, we should also hold firm the affirmation of the hope unwavering. That is the second time the author spoke of our affirmation. The first time he said, **“Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us take hold of the affirmation”** (Hebrews 4:14).

Remember, an affirmation is a positive declaration, an acknowledgment, a confession. The affirmation of hope we have is in God our heavenly Father, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And we proudly declare to the world our hope in them. We have forsaken the vain hopes of the things in this world. Our hope is for the new and living way of eternal life in heaven with God where righteousness dwells.

Our Creator God promised that for us, and he is always faithful. As Solomon said, this world is a place of vanity of vanities (see Ecclesiastes 1:2). But Almighty God is our heavenly Father, and we trust the faithfulness of his promises. Therefore dear reader, hold firm the affirmation of the hope unwavering. Let nothing take it from you. Cling to your hope the way a young child clings to his mother. Your eternal soul depends upon it.

## Examine each other

- **And let us examine each other for provocation of love and good works** (Hebrews 10:24).

Any man who resists or resents being examined has something he wants to hide. Of course, there are some things that should be hidden. It is good to hide things like the private parts of our body and our private lives with our families. Only men like clinicians

should be allowed to examine those private things about us, and then only when we need their help.

Nevertheless, most other things about us should be open to examination. As the author said, we should examine each other for provocation of love and good works. By examining each other we can encourage each other to love each other and help encourage each other for good works. The purpose of examining each other should always be for provocation of love and good works. Any other motive should be condemned.

Below are three examples of the right kind of examinations:

**But let a man examine himself, and let him so eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord** (First Corinthians 11:28-29).

**Examine yourselves whether ye are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or know ye not yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless ye are somehow unfit** (Second Corinthians 13:5).

**I [Jesus Christ] know thy works, and thy toil, and thy perseverance, and that thou cannot tolerate evil, and thou examined those who say themselves to be apostles, and are not, and found them false** (Revelation 2:2).

## Do not forsake assembling

- **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 10:25).

I need first to explain what is meant by forsaking the assembling together. Forsaking means to renounce, desert, abandon. Not attending every single gathering would certainly not be considered forsaking the assembling together, because many congregations meet several times each week for various purposes. Only members who would fail to attend any of the meetings at all would be those who are forsaking the assembling together, and they would need to be encouraged. Those who frequently fail to meet could also be accused of forsaking the assembling together, and they too would need to be encouraged.

We all need to assemble together, because it is very important for us. For we all have our own individual lives to live, and without assembling together regularly we weaken the closeness of our fellowship and unity. If we love each other as Christ commanded us, then we would want to assemble together. People who love each other do not like to remain apart. Those who forsake the assembling together reveal a deficiency of love for the other members.

Such a deficiency may be caused by a disappointment about them. For the assembly itself may contribute to that weakening of love when they show a weakening in their faithfulness to Christ and his good news. A congregation actually discourages some from assembling together with them when they begin to compromise with the world and drift away from full obedience to the commands of Christ.

Such deviations from the commands of Christ are the major cause of all the divisions we have among those who claim to believe in him. For those who love Christ most of all will

begin to lose their love for those who are becoming less faithful to him, especially when such members refuse to repent. The Bible is filled with examples of how the most faithful to God were gradually separated from those who were becoming unfaithful.

The author said we should exhort assembling together so much the more as long as we see the day approaching. The day approaching refers to the end of the world, which for each of us is when our bodies perish. When we die that is the end of the world for us. Therefore, we need to assemble ourselves together for continual exhortation.

The assembling together of ourselves strengths our love and fellowship with each other. It also strengthens our faith and our loyalty to Christ when we love him as we should. And we need strong faith because this world is constantly threatening our faith. For the longer we live in the world the more challenges we will have to our faith. Those threats can accumulate and grow stronger unless we assemble ourselves together to combat them and to strengthen our fellowship and unity with Christ and his church.

## Judgment and fire devouring the opposition

- **For when we sin willfully after taking the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire, a fervor that is going to devour the opposition** (Hebrews 10:26-27).

Even the most zealous Christian is going to offend God occasionally for various reasons. However, when a man continues to sin willfully after taking the knowledge of the truth, after becoming a disciple of Christ, he will not be forgiven. For the author of Hebrews says about such a man, “... **there remains no more a sacrifice for sins.**” The redemption of Christ is only for those who repent completely of their sins. And true repentance means permanently turning away from sin to live righteously.

When there is no repentance there is no forgiveness. All that remains for those who sin willfully is “**a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire, a fervor that is going to devour the opposition.**” That will happen to every sinner at the end of the world. They will be judged and condemned to the lake of fire called hell. If it is certain that the faithful disciples of Christ will enter the joys of heaven, so also it is certain that sinners who fail to repent in this life will experience “**a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire**” in the afterlife.

The author said that fearful judgment and fire is a fervor that will devour the opposition. Intense heat is often called a fervor. And that fervor, that terrible fire is going to devour all who oppose God. It will devour them in the sense of swallowing them up and destroying their ability to oppose God. For their eternal spirits will be bound in hell to suffer its torments without freedom or rest.

## Dying without mercies

- **Any man who has disregarded the law of Moses dies without mercies from two or three witnesses** (Hebrews 10:28).

Here is the law about that: **“If there be found in the midst of thee, within any of thy gates which Jehovah thy God gives thee, man or woman, who does that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods, and worshiped them ... thou shall stone them to death with stones. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he who is to die be put to death. He shall not be put to death at the mouth of one witness”** (Deuteronomy 17:2-6).

There was to be no mercy given for those who were guilty of transgressing God’s covenant and turning to other gods. However, the evidence against such a man needed to be supported by two or three witnesses. One was never enough because the risk of condemning an innocent man would have been much greater.

### How much worse punishment

- **By how much worse punishment do ye think he will deserve who has trampled the Son of God, and who considered profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who treated the Spirit of grace contemptuously? For we know him who said, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God** (Hebrews 10:29-31).

The punishment of an Israelite who disregarded the law of Moses was death and a fearful expectation of judgment and of fire. The author said that punishment will be much worse for a man who tramples the Son of God, and who considers profane the blood of the covenant (God’s new covenant for us) by which he was sanctified, and who treats the Spirit of grace contemptuously. That is a very fearful description of the consequences of remaining an unrepentant sinner.

Trampling the Son of God is figurative for riding roughshod over his good news of salvation. That is what unrepentant sinners do toward his offer of eternal salvation. They destroy the value of his sacrifice for them (but not for those who believe in him).

Moreover, unrepentant sinners consider profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified. Jesus sanctified himself to be the high priest of the new covenant by the shedding of his blood on the cross. He spoke about that sanctification during his prayer at the time of the last supper, when he said to God about his disciples, **“Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is 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. And I pray not about these only, but also about those who believe in me through their word ...”** (John 17:17-20).

The author said that unrepentant sinners consider his blood sacrifice profane. Profane means base and unclean. Thus, unrepentant sinners consider the sacrifice of the life of Jesus to be base and unclean. They consider it a foolish and useless act because they do not believe in its value. In that way they condemn his sacrifice.

Unrepentant sinners also treat the Spirit of grace contemptuously. Part of God’s offer to those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, and are immersed in water

for the remission of them, is to send his Holy Spirit into their hearts. By their refusal unrepentant sinners treat that Spirit of God's grace contemptuously.

The rejection of the Son of God by unrepentant sinners is not only ugly but it is cruel to him. It is great cruelty when a man sacrifices his life to save someone else who only shows contempt for his sacrifice. Such an evil response to the great sacrifice of the Son of God will result in much worse punishment from God. He will avenge that rejection and contempt.

What the author said about God's vengeance and judging is found in this Old Testament passage: "**Vengeance is for me, and recompense [repaying] ... For Jehovah will judge his people ...**" (Deuteronomy 32:35-36).

And the author of Hebrews added, "**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**" He who created the most terrifying creatures and forces in the world has the power to create terrifying punishment. That is why it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands. A terrifying thing will happen to unrepentant sinners when this life is over. And it will happen because they deserve it.

### Sufferings after being enlightened

- **But remember the former days, in which, after being enlightened, ye endured a great contest of sufferings, partly made a spectacle, both by reviling and afflictions, and partly having become companions of those so treated** (Hebrews 10:32-33).

Since this book speaks so much about the Hebrew people, then what the author calls "the former days" probably refer to the times of severe persecutions of the early church in Israel. Remember what happened after Stephen was stoned: "**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**" (Acts 8:1-3). Those early Christians were all Hebrews, because the good news of Christ had not yet been given to the Gentiles.

The author of this book said those early disciples endured a great contest of sufferings, which included partly being made a spectacle, both by reviling and afflictions. A spectacle refers to a public display that arouses a lot of attention. And the revilings and afflictions suffered by those early Christians made them a spectacle to the public. And that no doubt included much humiliation.

The author said those sufferings were a great contest. That could refer to the efforts of those early Christians to fight back, although not with the force of arms. They fought back with truth, using "**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**" (Ephesians 6:17) the same way Stephen did (see Acts 7). That great contest could also refer to the struggle within themselves to maintain their faith and loyalty during the time of those sufferings when they could have escaped by renouncing Christ.

Those early sufferings included both reviling and afflictions. Being reviled means having abusive and contemptuous words uttered against you, and that can be very painful. Afflictions refer to many kinds of physical sufferings. Hence, those early Christians suffered both in body through afflictions, and in mind through revilings.

The author said they not only were partly made a spectacle, but they also partly became companions of those so treated. Suffering can also come vicariously. For example, parents can suffer simply by seeing their children being injured. Therefore, even those who were not directly persecuted would have suffered because they were companions of those who were made a spectacle. And the more you love someone the more you will suffer when you see them suffering.

Notice how the author said that great contest of sufferings occurred to them after they became enlightened. That means it happened after they learned the truth about Christ and his good news, which led them to believe in him. For it was only after they confessed Christ and obeyed him that they were subject to that great contest of sufferings. And we too can expect times when we will face a contest of sufferings because of our faith.

Notice also how the author said they endured that great contest of sufferings. They did not surrender to it. They endured the sufferings of their faith because of the great hope they had in their faith. The author speaks of that in the next passage.

The author also told them to remember those former days. Peter spoke of those evil days, 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”** (First Peter 4:12).

God uses those contests of suffering to test our spirits. And we should always remember that such times will come to all who belong to Christ, although not always at the same time. We need, therefore, to always be prepared for them by continuing to strengthen our faith.

## A superior and enduring existence

- **For ye were both compassionate about my bonds, and ye accepted with joy the plundering of your possessions, knowing yourselves to have a superior and an enduring existence in the heavens** (Hebrews 10:34).

The author here mentions his bondage. There are several things about this book that suggest it was written by the apostle Paul, including this reference to being in bonds. Remember however, Paul was not alone in suffering bondage for the cause of Christ.

Nevertheless, whoever the author may have been, we can see from what he wrote in this book that he was a man of great faith. And we too can be men of great faith, if we remain loyal to Christ and continue to work in his service, even during great contests of sufferings.

The author spoke well of those to whom he was writing when he mentioned their compassion about his bonds. Compassion is the sympathetic feeling we have toward those who are in need. And genuine compassion always arouses a desire to help. Hence, there is no doubt those people expressed their compassion by doing or offering to do something to

help him. And we should do the same toward those who deserve our compassion, especially when they are suffering persecutions.

He also mentioned how they accepted with joy the plundering of their possessions. That plundering must have been during the time of their sufferings when they were made a spectacle by revilings and afflictions. Their possessions were probably plundered either by their rulers who declared them outlaws, or by those who took advantage of their unpopularity to loot and rob them, or perhaps even by both.

It took great faith for those persecuted Christians to accept with joy the plundering of their possessions. That was especially true because they knew they could escape their persecution by denying Christ. However, because of their great faith, they knew they had a superior and an enduring existence in the heavens. They knew it because they trusted the promises of God.

Paul spoke of our superior and enduring existence in the heavens, when he spoke these beautiful words, **“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).

Therefore, accept joyfully in your spirit whatever persecutions you may suffer for Christ, even though your body will groan. Follow the steps of Jesus our Lord, and look ahead to the superior and enduring experience we will have in the heavens.

### The need of perseverance

- **Therefore do not throw off your boldness, which has great recompense of reward. For ye have need of perseverance, so that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise** (Hebrews 10:35-36).

Notice what the apostle John said about our great recompense of reward: **“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.**

**“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 21:2-7).

Therefore, we must not throw off our boldness, regardless of how great a contest of sufferings we must endure. Preserve your faith and your hope in Christ, because he will bring you through. Remember what he said to his apostles: **“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).

Through persevering in our obedience to the will of God we will gain our souls and receive his promise to us. Let neither persecutions nor alluring temptations lead you astray. Use your faith and your hope and your love for Christ to keep you persevering.

Yes dear reader, I am preaching to you, just as the author of Hebrew is. The world scoffs at preaching and ridicules it. But Paul said, “... **it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe**” (First Corinthians 1:21). Therefore, I will continue to preach the word of God to you, to help save your souls, and mine.

## He is coming

**For yet a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay** (Hebrews 10:37).

He who is coming is Jesus Christ. Remember what he said to his disciples about the end of the world: **“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.**

**“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 24:29-31).

The author said that his coming would be **“yet a very little while”** and he **“will not delay.”** Those words were spoken about two thousand years ago, and Jesus has not yet come. Hence, what he meant by a very little while, and he will not delay, was not as we reckon time. Relative to eternity, thousands of years are a very little while.

Moreover, perhaps relative to our own lifetimes, he will come in a very little while. Our lives at best are very short. As James said about them, **“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 immediately after we die we will see Christ coming for us. For since we will be conscience of nothing when we sleep in death, his coming will seem immediate when we awaken, even if we sleep for thousands of years. It will be immediate in our consciousness. Therefore, rejoice in the hope we have in him.

## The righteous will live from faith

- **But the righteous man will live from faith, and if he should withdraw, my soul is not pleased with him. But we are not of retreat for destruction, but of faith for the preservation of the soul** (Hebrews 10:38-39).

The words about the righteous man living from faith are first found in the book of Habakkuk from the Old Testament: **“But the righteous man shall live by his faith”** (Habakkuk 2:4). Remember, Paul frequently taught that righteous men will live from faith. Righteous

men live from their faith and trust in our Creator God. We believe in him, and trust in his love for us. And we live our lives according to that faith.

Those words about the righteous man in the book of Habakkuk were probably spoken by Jehovah, because they also say that his soul is not pleased with him if he should withdraw. Notice how that passage in Hebrews mentions the soul of God. Another passage that speaks of the soul of God is this one in 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”** (Isaiah 42:1).

Those words are quoted in the book of Matthew as a prophecy of Jesus: **“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”** (Matthew 12:18). Those passages about the soul of God are more evidence that he has both a spirit and a body. You can read more detail of what I say about the soul of God in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

God is very displeased when a man turns from his righteousness. And you can see how displeased God is, because the author says the consequence is destruction. But as the author also says, we are not of retreat for destruction. We who are righteous are of faith for the preservation of our soul. Our soul is preserved from death to live in heaven with God forever. Our faith in God keeps us righteous, and that keeps us secure in his great promises.

## What faith is

- **Now faith is the foundation of hoping, the conviction of events not being seen** (Hebrews 11:1-3).

That passage begins with a definition of faith. Faith is the foundation of hoping, because nobody hopes who does not have faith. Hope is an expectation of what will happen, and expecting things is a result of believing they will happen. Therefore, faith is the foundation of hoping.

Faith is also the conviction of events not being seen. A conviction is a state of being convinced about something, which is in itself a belief. Therefore, faith is a conviction about events that are not being seen. It is being convinced of the truth of something that is not visible.

## By faith we understand

- **For by this the ancients were well reported. By faith we understand the ages to have been prepared by the word of God. For the things that are seen do not come to be from that which is visible** (Hebrews 11:2-3).

Being well reported means being well informed. The ancients were well reported by their faith, because they believed the word of God. For it is the word of God that reveals to us the truth about him, about ourselves, and about the world.

It is by faith that we understand how the world was created. The ages refer to periods of time. The world was prepared for mankind as a place to live and grow through periods of

time with the recycling of everything in it. And it was created and prepared that way by the word of God. For when he uttered his voice, energy came forth from his throne (from the seven Spirits of God) to create what he commanded. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Unlike the foolish belief of foolish men who now dominate modern science the world did not create itself. Any man who proclaimed that the things men create in the world created themselves would be immediately recognized as a fool. Yet the foolish modern world proclaims that the entire world with all the living things in it created itself.

We who have been well reported by our faith in the word of God understand that he created the world. It is by our faith that we understand he created it because he is invisible to us. We believe the things that are seen are the results of his great creative power, not the results of nature itself. That makes us far more informed than the spiritually blind men who dominate modern science. Be not led astray with them, lest you too fall into the ditch of eternal damnation.

## The faith of Abel

- **By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, because of which he was reported to be righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through it, he who died still speaks** (Hebrews 11:4).

The following passage tells the story of Cain and Abel: **“And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from Jehovah. And again she bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering to Jehovah of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offering, but he did not have respect to Cain and to his offering.**

**“And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. And Jehovah said to Cain, Why are thou angry? And why has thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou do not well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire shall be for thee, and thou shall rule over it. And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him. And Jehovah said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?”** (Genesis 4:1-9).

Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s because it involved the shedding of blood, and that is what God requires of the sacrifices to him. Jehovah was not being partial to Abel. He even told Cain his sacrifices would be accepted if he did them right.

There are many good lessons in that passage besides learning that only blood sacrifices are acceptable to God. Regarding those sacrifices, remember Jesus was the perfect blood sacrifice, and there is no need for any other. Indeed, making a sacrifice like that of Abel would now be rejected like that of Cain.

Cain sinned because he was stubbornly self-willed. Rather than making the right kind of sacrifice, he chose to kill Abel who did make the right kind. And that is the way the unre-

pentant sinners of the world always are. Rather than obeying the will of God, they attack and persecute those of us who do obey him. But there is a great judgment day coming.

Cain was not only bitter toward the command of God, but he was full of hate toward his brother. That is clearly revealed by his attitude about murdering him. He even spoke sarcastically to Jehovah when he was asked about his brother, answering him with the now famous words, **“Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

Cain’s response reminds me of the words of the apostle John: **“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and no cause of stumbling is in him. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness, and he goes about in the darkness, and knows not where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes”** (First John 2:10-11), and, **“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). He who hates his brother is a man-killer in the figurative sense, because he is against him.

## The faith of Enoch

- **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. And apart from faith it is impossible to please him. For he who comes to God must believe that he is, and becomes a rewarder of those who search for him** (Hebrews 11:5-6).

The following passage tells the story of Enoch: **“And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him”** (Genesis 5:21-24). That is all the Old Testament says about Enoch, although it does mention other men named Enoch.

We only know more about Enoch from the above passage in the book of Hebrews. In that passage, being transferred means being taken into heaven. Perhaps Enoch was transferred the same way Elijah was while he was walking with Elisha: **“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. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen of it! And he saw him no more”** (Second Kings 2:11-12).

The Bible says that both Enoch and Elijah were men of God who were pleasing to him. We know of only Enoch and Elijah who were taken directly to heaven before they died. The rest of us must first die, because the author of Hebrew said that **“it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, judgment ...”** (Hebrews 9:27). Nevertheless, no man who does not please God will every be taken into heaven. And no man who does not believe in God can be pleasing to him.

As the author said, **“For he who comes to God must believe that he is, and becomes a rewarder of those who search for him.”** Not only must we believe that God exists, but we must also have faith that he becomes a rewarder of those who search for him.

It is our duty to search for God, as Paul said to the Athenians: **“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).

God made us to search for him. And truly we must grope for him to find him. Although it is obvious that God created the world, it is not obvious who he is and what he is like. Nor is it obvious exactly how he wants us to live. We are all born with a basic sense of right and wrong, and that helps us in our search to find him. However, it is only through his holy book the Bible that we can learn who he is and what his is like, and find exactly how he wants us to live. For that book contains the word of God, and it is the bright shining light for our spirits.

Nevertheless, regardless of how much a man may be able to learn from God’s holy word, God is a rewarder of those who search for him. Even those who have never seen or heard about the Bible will be rewarded for believing in him and searching for him. We will all be rewarded in heaven for believing in him and searching for him while we lived in this dark world of sin.

All who love truth and righteousness will search for him. Those who are like Cain do not want to know him.

## The faith of Noah

- **By faith Noah, being divinely warned about things not yet seen, moved with awe, prepared an ark for the salvation of his house, through which he condemned the world, and became an heir of righteousness according to faith** (Hebrews 11:7).

The following passage tells the story of Noah: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart. And Jehovah said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground, from man, to beast, to creeping things, and birds of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.**

**“These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.**

**“And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.**

**“Make thee an ark of gopher wood. Thou shall make rooms in the ark, and shall pitch it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how thou shall make it: ... . And I, behold, I bring the flood of waters upon this earth, to destroy all flesh, in which is the**

**breath of life, from under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with thee. And thou shall come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee"** (Genesis 6:5-18).

Notice how the author of Hebrews said that God established his covenant with Noah. And it was through Noah's preparation of the ark that he (1) condemned the world, and (2) became an heir of righteousness according to faith.

The ark was about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Constructing it no doubt took Noah and his sons many years. And while he was building the ark the people could see what he was doing. That gave him a wonderful opportunity to warn them. However, none of the people heeded that warning. And so the preparation of the ark served to condemn the world, because it was testimony to them of their wickedness before God.

By preparing the ark Noah also became an heir of righteousness according to faith. An heir is someone who inherits something. Noah inherited salvation through his righteousness according to faith. Noah believed God when he said he was going to destroy mankind with a world-wide flood. And it was his faith in God that moved him with awe to prepare the ark. He could have been like the rest of the world and ignored God's warning.

Noah's righteousness, even to the point of building a massive ark on dry land, was according to faith. It was Noah's faith in God that caused him to be righteous. And if we too want to be truly righteous, we must believe that God exists and becomes a rewarder of those who search for him.

## The faith of Abraham

- **By faith Abraham, when called, obeyed to go out to the place that he was going to take for an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived alien in the land of promise as a foreigner, having dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow heirs of the same promise. For he anticipated the city that has the foundations, whose builder and architect is God** (Hebrews 11:8-10).

The following passage tells the story of when Jehovah first called Abraham (who was first named Abram): **"Now Jehovah said to Abram, 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.**

**"So Abram went as Jehovah had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan.**

**"And they came into the land of Canaan. And Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And**

**Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said, I will give this land to thy seed. And there he built an altar to Jehovah, who appeared to him”** (Genesis 12:1-7).

How Jehovah called Abraham is never told, but Abraham was obviously convinced about the calling. And his faith in God was strong enough to go, even though he did not know where he was going. God’s promise to him was that he would inherit the land where God sent him, that he would bless Abraham, and that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

God made the same promise to Isaac, the son of Abraham, and to Jacob, the son of Isaac. Abraham had other sons, but Isaac was the son of promise. And Isaac had two sons, but Jacob was the son of promise.

God made Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rich and powerful in their lifetimes. However, the land was not given until several centuries after Abraham died. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived their lives in tents as nomads in the land of promise, although Jacob lived the last part of his life in Egypt. The land was given to their descendants, the sons of Israel. Moreover, the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him was not filled until after two thousand years. For it was through Christ and his church that the promise to Abraham was fulfilled.

The author of Hebrews said that Abraham **“anticipated the city that has the foundations, whose builder and architect is God.”** That seems to refer to the new Jerusalem of heaven. God apparently told Abraham something about that, although there is no record of it.

We should never think that everything God did and said to men was recorded in the Bible. Enough is recorded there for us to believe in God and know his will for us. Therefore, we too should follow the steps of Abraham to believe God and anticipate **“the city that has the foundations, whose builder and architect is God.”** For as God fulfilled his promises to Abraham, so also he will fulfill his promises to us—if we continue to trust and obey him.

## The faith of Sarah

- **By faith also Sarah herself received power for conception of seed, and she gave birth beyond the time of age, because she considered him faithful who promised** (Hebrews 11:11).

Part of the story of Sarah is told in the following passage: **“And Jehovah appeared to him 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).

That passage tells how Jehovah appeared to Abraham in the form of a man with two of his heavenly agents (whom he later sent to examine the people of Sodom and Gomorrah). Abraham had been waiting many years for God to fulfill his promise that he and his wife Sarah would have a son. He even kept his faith when he and Sarah were old, and well stricken in age. He kept his faith, even when it **“had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.”**

This time Jehovah told Abraham when he would have a son, and Sarah heard what Jehovah said. For an elderly woman to have a child in the natural way is enough to make anyone laugh, and that is what Sarah did when she heard. No doubt she did not laugh aloud, but within herself. That is why she denied having laughed; her denial was not a lie. But Jehovah knew her thoughts, and he knew she laughed within herself.

Sarah’s laugh was a natural reflex, which she suppressed except within her. She suppressed it because she was a noble and refined woman. Nevertheless, she did believe what Jehovah said to Abraham about her having a son **“when the season comes round.”** We know she believed because that is what the author of Hebrews says. Sarah believed **“because she considered him faithful who promised.”**

The story of the fulfillment of that promise is given in the following passage: **“And Jehovah visited Sarah as he had said, and Jehovah did to Sarah as he had spoken. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.**

**“And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made me to laugh. Everyone who hears will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham, that Sarah should give sons suck? For I have borne him a son in his old age”** (Genesis 21:1-7).

Sarah laughed with joy when Isaac was born from her. The Bible says that Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born.

### From one aged man came countless others

- **And therefore from one man, and these things having become deadened, were begotten as the stars of the heaven for multitude, and as the sand of the seashore, countless (Hebrews 11:12).**

The things of Abraham that became deadened were those parts of his body that enabled him to produce offspring. They were deadened in the sense that they lost their power to reproduce. That happens to all men as they become aged. And remember, Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born.

However, through the power of God, Abraham was able to beget a son in his old age, through whom a new race (the Hebrews) developed that multiplied into the millions. Not only did the Hebrews multiply into the millions, but it was through Abraham that the Christ came. And it is through Christ that all the nations of the earth are blessed. They are blessed in being able to become offspring of the faith of Abraham. That is how he begot **“as the stars of the heaven for multitude, and as the sand of the seashore, countless.”**

Paul wrote much about that when he told how Abraham is father of us all: **“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. 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.**

**“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 4:13-18).**

Abraham is father of all who have faith in God. And since Jesus said that the entire universe is going to be colonized by mankind (see Matthew 24:1), then the seed of the faith of Abraham will literally be **“as the stars of the heaven for multitude, and as the sand of the seashore, countless.”**

### Aspiring for a heavenly land

- **All these died in faith, not having taken the promises, but who saw and greeted them from afar, and who confessed that they were foreigners and sojourners on the earth. For those who say such things show that they are seeking a fatherland. And if indeed they remembered that from which they came out, they would have had time to return. But now they aspire for a superior one, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of**

**them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city** (Hebrews 11:13-16).

We who love our heavenly Father do not love the world. For the apostle John said, **“If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”** (First John 2:15-16).

We look upon ourselves as **“foreigners and sojourners on the earth.”** We are foreigners and sojourners here because we **“are seeking a fatherland.”** And since we do not belong to the world, therefore the world hates us. As Jesus said to his apostles, **“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).

We have faith that God will give us the fatherland we seek, that heavenly land. And according to the author of Hebrews, even those righteous souls who lived before Christ had that same faith. For he said they **“saw and greeted them from afar.”** What they greeted were the promises of God, which they saw through the eyes of their faith. And they greeted them from afar through their hope.

The author said, that because of their faith **“God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.”** He is not ashamed of them because they believe in him and love him and trust him and hope in him. And they obey him because genuine faith always includes obedience.

And because of our faith, God is not ashamed of us, to be called our God. He is ashamed of those who have no faith in him, and he will not be called their God. He has disowned them because they have disowned him. But for those who have faith in him, he has prepared for us a city, a great and marvelous city in heaven.

John describes what he saw about that city in his great vision of heaven: **“And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, the light of it similar to a most precious stone, like a jasper stone being crystal clear, which has a great and high wall having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve agents, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel: from the east, three gates, and from the north, three gates, and from the south, three gates, and from the west, three gates.**

**“And the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who spoke with me had a measure, a golden reed, so that he might measure the city, and the gates of it, and the walls of it. And the city lies foursquare, and the length of it is as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs, the length and the breadth and the height of it being equal. And he measured the wall of it, a hundred and forty-four forearms, a measure of a man, that is, of an agent. And the structure of its wall was jasper.**

**“And the city was pure gold, similar to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city adorned with every precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the sec-**

ond, sapphire, the third, chalcedony, the fourth, emerald, the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl, the ninth, topaz, the tenth, chrysoptase, the eleventh, jacinth, the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls apiece, each one of the gates was of one pearl. And the thoroughfare of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, so that they might shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the light of it is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it. And the gates of it will, no, not be locked by day, for there will be no night there. And they will bring the splendor and the worth of the nations into it.

“And there will, no, not enter into it anything profane, and doing an abomination and a lie, since they are not written in the Lamb’s book of life. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its thoroughfare. And on this side of the river and on that was a tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit according to each month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

“And there will be no curse there. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him. And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads. And there will be no night there, and they have no need of a lamp and the light of sun, because Lord God will illuminate them. And they will reign into the ages of the ages” (Revelation 21:10-22:5).

Remember, that marvelous description of the city that God has prepared for us is filled with figurative language. It was necessary to use so much figurative language because it is impossible to describe the glories of the new Jerusalem in any human language. It is impossible because that great city is not made of anything earthly.

## By faith Abraham offered Isaac

- **By faith Abraham, being tested, offered Isaac. And he who received the promises offered his only begotten son, about whom it was said, The seed by thee will be called in Isaac. Having reckoned that God is able to raise up even from the dead, from where also, in a figure, he did receive him back (Hebrews 11:17-19).**

The story of how God tested the faith of Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of promise, is told in following passage: “**And it came to pass after these things, that God proved Abraham, and said to him, Abraham. And he said, Here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou love, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah. And offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.**

“**And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. And he split the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day**

Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, Abide ye here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder, and we will worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. And they went both of them together.

“And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, My father. And he said, Here I am, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of. And Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

“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 22:1-12).

Lest you criticize God for testing Abraham that way, remember it was God who gave him Isaac. God not only owns everyone and everything because he made everything, but he can do anything he wants. Nevertheless, whatever God does is always good and right and just. Abraham had learned enough about God to know it. That is why the passage in Hebrews says Abraham offered Isaac by faith.

Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. And the author says that, in a figure of speaking, Abraham did receive Isaac back from the dead. For Isaac was as good as dead just before God stopped Abraham. Abraham was truly going to take the life of his son Isaac in obedience to the command of God. His great faith in God is why he is called the father of the faithful (see Romans 4:11-12).

God will never again test any man that way. Abraham was a unique man with special circumstances about him. God tests each of us according to what we are and the circumstances about us. Nevertheless, regardless of how God tests us, we should all follow the steps of great men like Abraham and our Lord Jesus Christ by remaining faithful to him whatever happens.

## The faith of Isaac

- **By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau about things coming** (Hebrews 11:20).

Isaac blessed them in a special way because he believed that God would fulfill the blessings. Therefore, it was by faith that he blessed them. That kind of blessing had special power. It was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which made it a guarantee of the good things spoken. Therefore, it was a coveted blessing.

For that reason Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, contrived to deceive him into giving the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau the firstborn. For the Bible record says, “**Now Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his venison. And Rebekah loved Jacob**” (Genesis 25:28). Isaac could be deceived because he lost his vision in his old age.

Here is the story of how Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. It is a long one, but I quote it for you in its entirety: **“And Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak to Esau thy brother, saying, Bring venison for me, and make savory food for me, that I may eat, and bless thee before Jehovah before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me two good kids of the goats from there. And I will make them savory food for thy father, such as he loves. And thou shall bring it to thy father, that he may eat, so that he may bless thee before his death.**

**“And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. My father will perhaps feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver. And I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. And his mother said to him, Upon me be thy curse, my son. Only obey my voice, and go fetch them for me.**

**“And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother. And his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the goodly garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck. And she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.**

**“And he came to his father, and said, My father. And he said, Here I am. Who are thou, my son? And Jacob said to his father, I am Esau thy firstborn. I have done according as thou bade me. Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said to his son, How is it that thou have found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because Jehovah thy God sent me good speed.**

**“And Isaac said to Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near to Isaac his father. And he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he did not discern him, because his hands were hairy as his brother Esau’s hands. So he blessed him. And he said, Are thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he ate. And he brought wine to him, and he drank.**

**“And his father Isaac said to him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him. And he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that Jehovah has blessed. And God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine. Let peoples serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brothers, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee. Cursed be he who curses thee, and blessed be he who blesses thee.**

**“And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also made savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son’s venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac his father said to him, Who are thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn, Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who**

then is he who has taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou came, and have blessed him? Yea, he shall be blessed.

“When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with guile, and has taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and, behold, now he has taken away my blessing. And he said, Have thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said to Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. And what then shall I do for thee, my son? And Esau said to his father, Have thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

“And Isaac his father answered and said to him, Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling, and of the dew of heaven from above. And by thy sword thou shalt live, and thou shalt serve thy brother. And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt break loose, that thou shalt shake his yoke from off thy neck” (Genesis 27:6-40).

That is the only time in Jacob’s life that we have any record he lied. And that was because his mother urged him. However, the Bible does mention several times when people lied to Jacob. Jacob was not a liar, although many foolish men proclaim he was. Do not join them and falsely accuse that righteous man.

Look at your own faults before criticizing those of Jacob, and remember Jesus’ words: “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).

## The faith of Jacob

- **By faith Jacob, while dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and bowed in worship upon the top of his staff (Hebrews 11:21).**

Here is the story of how Jacob (also called Israel) blessed the two sons of Joseph: “And it came to pass after these things, that it was reported to Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick. And he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And it was reported to Jacob, saying, Behold, thy son Joseph comes to thee.

“And Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said to me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a company of peoples, and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

“And now thy two sons, who were born to thee in the land of Egypt before I came to thee into Egypt, are mine, Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, shall be mine. And thy issue, which thou beget after them, shall be thine, they shall be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

“And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to come to Ephrath. And I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem).

“And Israel beheld Joseph’s sons, and said, Who are these? And Joseph said to his father, They are my sons, whom God has given me here. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, to me, and I will bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near to him, and he kissed them, and embraced them.

“And Israel said to Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face, and, lo, God has let me see thy seed also. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near to him.

“And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands deliberately, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said, The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the agent who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

“And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him. And he held up his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father, for this is the firstborn, put thy right hand upon his head.

“And his father refused, and said, I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee will Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh. And he set Ephraim before Manasseh”

“And Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I die, but God will be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brothers, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow” (Genesis 48).

Jacob adopted the two sons of Joseph so that Joseph would have a double portion of blessing. For Jacob said to Joseph, “**I have given to thee one portion above thy brothers.**” Therefore, when the tribes of Israel are listed in the Bible, Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned instead of Joseph.

Joseph was given one portion above his brothers because he proved himself to be so much more worthy than they were. Joseph was tested severely by God, but he never lost his faith in him. The story of Joseph is a beautiful one, and it is told in the last one-fourth of the book of Genesis (Genesis 37-50).

After blessing the two sons of Joseph, Jacob blessed his other sons. The record of that begins with the words, “**And Jacob called to his sons, and said, gather yourselves**

together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days. Assemble yourselves, and hear, ye sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father” (Genesis 49:1-2).

## The faith of Joseph

- **By faith Joseph, while perishing, remembered about the exodus of the sons of Israel, and commanded about his bones** (Hebrews 11:22).

Jacob prophesied to Joseph that God would bring his people the sons of Israel back again from Egypt to the promised land: **“And Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I die, but God will be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers”** (Genesis 48:21).

And when Joseph knew that he was about to die, he commanded the sons of Israel to bring his bones with them to the promised land when that time came: **“And Joseph said to his brothers, I die, but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from here”** (Genesis 50:24-25).

Joseph was a great man of faith in God throughout his life.

## The faith of Moses’ parents

- **By faith Moses, after being born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw the child well-formed, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict** (Hebrews 11:23).

Here is the story of the birth of Moses: **“And Pharaoh ordered all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bore a son. And when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.**

**“And when she could no longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch. And she put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s edge. And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him”** (Exodus 1:22-2:4).

Pharaoh’s command that every newborn son be killed was one of the most cruel things the Egyptians did to the sons of Israel. Therefore, it was an act of justice for God to cause the death of every first born son of the Egyptians when he brought his ten plagues against them.

The author of Hebrews said that Moses’ parents were not afraid of the king’s edict. They were not afraid of that cruel command. But if they had kept Moses alive with them, then they would have certainly been found out. And if that happened, not only would the Egyptians have killed Moses, but they would have killed his parents and their other children as well. For Moses had an older brother named Aaron, and an older sister named Miriam.

It was to save the lives of their other children that his Mother made a small boat for Moses to be placed in the river. His mother was obviously trusting that God would somehow save the child, because his sister Miriam stood at a distance **“to know what would be done to him.”** And God did save him through the very daughter of Pharaoh.

Here is how that happened: **“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked along by the riverside. And she saw the ark among the reeds, and sent her handmaid to fetch it. And she opened it, and saw the child, and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children.**

**“Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, Shall I go and call a nurse for thee from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maiden went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.**

**“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said, Because I drew him out of the water”** (Exodus 2:5-10).

### The faith of Moses

- **By faith Moses, having become great, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, having chosen rather to be mistreated with the people of God, than to have the pleasure of sin temporarily. Having esteemed the vilification of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he focused toward the recompense of reward** (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses became great in Egypt because he was the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. However, Moses’ mother must have been active in rearing him even beyond the time he was weaned. That is probably how he learned that he was a Hebrew. If his mother was his nursemaid throughout his childhood, then she must have taught him much about God and his people.

The Bible record clearly shows what a marvelous spirit and character Moses had, loving truth and righteousness. Being the son of Pharaoh’s daughter meant Moses was a prince in Egypt. Nevertheless, his heart was with the people of God. Therefore, because Moses loved God and his righteousness he sacrificed his life as a prince in Egypt, choosing instead **“to be mistreated with the people of God, than to have the pleasure of sin temporarily.”**

The author of Hebrews says that Moses **“esteemed the vilification of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.”** To vilify means to revile and defame. Although the Egyptians knew nothing about the Christ, they still vilified him in the evil way they treated the people of God. Whoever reviles and mistreats God’s people, reviles and mistreats Christ.

Remember how Jesus taught that lesson when he was describing what will happen on the day of judgment: **“But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels**

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.

“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 25:31-46).

The author of the book of Hebrews also said that Moses “**focused toward the recompense of reward.**” Those words together with what the author said about how Moses rejected “**the pleasure of sin temporarily**” indicate that Moses knew about eternal life in heaven. He must have also learned about that from his mother. That means the Hebrews knew about it. And they must have learned about it from their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Old Testament record says very little about the reward of eternal life. It was from the mouth of Jesus Christ the Son of God that we learn so much about our recompense of reward in heaven. God must have wanted that knowledge to be a major part of the good news of Christ, which is why so little was known about it before he came to the earth.

## By faith Moses forsook Egypt

- **By faith he forsook Egypt, not having feared the wrath of the king, for he persevered as seeing the invisible** (Hebrews 11:27).

Here is the story of why Moses forsook Egypt: “**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”** (Exodus 2:11-15).

Moses had already forsaken the Egyptian way of life because of its sinfulness before he went out to see the burdens of his brothers, the sons of Israel.

When Moses killed the Egyptian who was smiting the Hebrew, he did not commit a murder, although many foolish men accuse him of it. Nowhere in the entire Bible does God condemn Moses for what he did. How then can any man accuse him? There are many circumstances not told that obviously made his attack against the Egyptian justified.

Moses hid the body of the Egyptian in the sand because he knew Pharaoh would condemn him regardless of what that Egyptian was doing to the Hebrew. And that is what Pharaoh did when he heard what happened; he sought to kill Moses.

The text in Exodus says that Moses feared when he learned that his killing of the Egyptian was known, while the author of Hebrews said that Moses did not fear the wrath of the king when he forsook Egypt.

Moses knew that Pharaoh would condemn him if he killed an Egyptian to defend a Hebrew, but that did not stop him. Not fearing the wrath of the king enabled him to do what was right about those two men. It was only after he learned that what he did was known that he feared Pharaoh and forsook Egypt.

Moses persevered (in doing right) because he was seeing the invisible. God would never have chosen Moses to lead his people out of Egyptian bondage to their promised land if Moses was not a man who persevered as seeing the invisible.

The invisible refers to God and the spiritual world. Moses saw God and the spiritual world through the eyes of his faith. That is how we all can see God and the spiritual world. And by keeping those invisible things in the sight of our minds we too can persevere as Moses did. We can continue to do that which is good and right and just even when we suffer because of it.

## **By faith Moses performed the Passover**

- **By faith he performed the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who was destroying the firstborn would not touch them** (Hebrews 11:28).

Destroying every firstborn male in Egypt was the last of the ten terrible plagues that Jehovah sent against the Egyptians to punish them. The people of Israel were protected from that destruction of the firstborn males by performing the Passover ceremony. It was called the Passover because the destroyer would pass over them when God smote the land of Egypt. And that ceremony was to continue from that time on, celebrated annually as a memorial.

Here is the story of how it began: **“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).**

Moses and the people of Israel believed God and obeyed him, as the following passage says: **“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, Draw out, and take to you lambs according to your families, and kill the Passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the basin, and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.**

**“For Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, Jehovah will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever.**

**“And it shall come to pass, when ye have come to the land which Jehovah will give you, according as he has promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your sons shall say to you, What do ye mean by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of Jehovah’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.**

**“And the people bowed the head and worshiped. And the sons of Israel went and did so, as Jehovah had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they” (Exodus 12:21-28).**

After that first Passover other regulations were given about it. Jews throughout history still observe that ceremony, but since the time of Christ it is impossible for anyone to obey all the commands about it. God made that impossible when he sent the Romans to destroy the temple and scatter the people after they rejected his Son Jesus Christ.

Christ is now our Passover, as Paul said: **“For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us”** (First Corinthians 5:7). Only by believing and obeying him can we avoid being destroyed in the lake of fire called hell.

## By faith they passed through the Red sea

- **By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land, of which the Egyptians, having taken an attempt, were drowned (Hebrews 11:29).**

Early in their exodus the Israelites needed to cross the Red sea, which was a formidable barrier on their way to the promised land. Here is the story of how Jehovah brought them to the other side: **“And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the sons of Israel, that they turn back and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon. Ye shall encamp opposite it by the sea. And Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, They are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he shall follow after them, and I will get for me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah. And they did so.**

**“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people were fled. And the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was changed towards the people, and they said, What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him. And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over all of them.**

**“And Jehovah hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the sons of Israel, for the sons of Israel went out with a high hand. And the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baal-zephon.**

**“And when Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they were very afraid. And the sons of Israel cried out to Jehovah, and they said to Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, have thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have thou dealt thus with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we spoke to thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness”**

**“And Moses said to the people, Fear ye not. Stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which he will work for you today, for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. Jehovah will fight for you, and ye shall keep silent.**

**“And Jehovah said to Moses, Why do thou cry to me? Speak to the sons of Israel, that they go forward. And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea,**

and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall go in after them, and I will get for me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his army, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have gotten for me honor upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

“And the agent of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. And the cloud and the darkness was there, yet it gave light by night. And the one did not come near the other all the night.

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the sons of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand, and on their left.

“And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass in the morning watch, that Jehovah looked forth upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and troubled the army of the Egyptians. And he took off their chariot wheels, and they drove them with difficulty, so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for Jehovah fights for them against the Egyptians.

“And Jehovah said to Moses, Stretch out thy hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared, and the Egyptians fled against it, and Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the army of Pharaoh who went in after them into the sea, there remained not so much as one of them.

“But the sons of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians. And the people feared Jehovah, and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses” (Exodus 14:1-31).

When Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, Jehovah caused the waters to separate, becoming **“a wall to them on their right hand, and on their left.”** The text says Jehovah used a strong east wind all night to divide the waters, and dry the sea floor. Exactly how that was done remains a mystery. However, God may have done it with a combination of atmospheric pressure and wind.

It is commonly known that the concentrated low atmospheric pressure within a hurricane can raise the ocean surface as much as twenty feet or more. Perhaps a very high localized atmospheric pressure combined with a strong downdraft pushed the water back so as to create a gradual sloping wall-like elevation of water on either side, like a valley between two low hills.

That east wind probably came from the dry Sinai wilderness. It may have been like a jet stream that came from a great height over the sea, then dropped rapidly down to the surface, spreading out and back to the wilderness where the people were going. That rapid dropping of the air would have created a very high pressure on the surface. That very high pressure together with the wind (blowing more gently toward the wilderness where the people were going) may have been what caused the waters to be divided back for a channel.

Although the people were afraid, they did have enough faith to cross the Red sea where Jehovah divided the waters to make a path for them. If they had no faith at all they would have been too afraid to even try to cross. That generation of the sons of Israel had some faith in God, but it was often small and short-lived. And God eventually cursed that generation to die in the wilderness because of their lack of faith in him.

## By faith the walls of Jericho fell

- **By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, having been encircled for seven days** (Hebrews 11:30).

Here is the story of how the sons of Israel destroyed the city of Jericho: **“Now Jericho was shut up tight because of the sons of Israel. None went out, and none came in. And Jehovah said to Joshua, See, I have given Jericho into thy hand, and the king of it, and the mighty men of valor. And ye shall encompass the city, all the men of war, going around the city once. Thus shall thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark.**

**“And the seventh day ye shall encompass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be, that, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout. And the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him.**

**“And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said to them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of Jehovah. And they said to the people, Pass on, and encompass the city, and let the armed men pass on before the ark of Jehovah.**

**“And it was so, that, when Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before Jehovah passed on, and blew the trumpets. And the ark of the covenant of Jehovah followed them. And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rearward went behind the ark, the priests blowing the trumpets as they went.**

**“And Joshua commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor let your voice be heard, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth until the day I bid you shout. Then ye shall shout. So he caused the ark of Jehovah to encompass the city, going around it once.**

**“And they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp. And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of Jehovah. And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of Jehovah went on continually,**

and blew the trumpets. And the armed men went before them, and the rearward came behind the ark of Jehovah, the priests blowing the trumpets as they went. And the second day they encompassed the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did six days.

“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early at the dawning of the day, and encompassed the city according to the same manner seven times. Only on that day they encompassed the city seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, Shout, for Jehovah has given you the city.

“And the city shall be set apart, even it and all that is in it, to Jehovah. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

“But as for you, only keep yourselves from what is set apart, lest when ye have set it apart, ye take from what is set apart. So ye would make the camp of Israel accursed, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are holy to Jehovah. They shall come into the treasury of Jehovah.

“So the people shouted, and the priests blew the trumpets. And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, that the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, both young and old, and ox, and sheep, and donkey, with the edge of the sword” (Joshua 6:1-21).

The ritual of circling the city for seven days that way certainly took faith in what God told them. For who would have thought the mighty walls of that great city would fall down by simply circling them? But this was a different generation from the one that came out of Egypt. They had more faith in Jehovah.

That process of circling the city no doubt had a powerful psychological effect on the citizens of Jericho. Each day it kept building fear in their hearts. And on the seventh day, when the sons of Israel circled the city seven times instead of only once, that must have caused the citizens of Jericho to panic, making their conquest much easier. Panic can make a people completely helpless. They may have been so paralyzed with fear that they did not even resist the attack when it happened.

## The faith of Rahab

- **By faith Rahab the harlot was not destroyed with those who were disobedient, having received the spies with peace (Hebrews 11:31).**

The above passage told how Rahab was saved during the destruction of Jericho. Below is the story of how she received with peace the Israelite spies sent by Joshua: “**And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men as spies secretly, saying, Go, view the land, and Jericho. And they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lay down there.**

“And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, men came in here tonight of the sons of Israel to search out the land. And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men who came to thee, who have entered into thy house, for they have come to search out all the land. And the woman took the two men, and hid them.

“And she said, Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know from where they were. And it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I know not. Pursue after them quickly, for ye will overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof. And the men pursued after them the way to the Jordan to the fords, and as soon as those who pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

“And before they were laid down, she came up to them upon the roof. And she said to the men, I know that Jehovah has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us. And that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man because of you, for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.

“Now therefore, I pray you, swear to me by Jehovah, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a true token, and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brothers, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death. And the men said to her, Our life for yours if ye do not utter this our business. And it shall be, when Jehovah gives us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

“Then she let them down by a cord through the window, for her house was upon the side of the wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said to them, Get you to the mountain lest the pursuers come upon you. And hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned, and afterward ye may go your way.

“And the men said to her, We will be guiltless of this thine oath which thou have made us to swear. Behold, when we come into the land, thou shall bind this line of scarlet cord in the window which thou let us down by. And thou shall gather to thee into the house thy father, and thy mother, and thy brothers, and all thy father’s household.

“And it shall be, that whoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we shall be guiltless. And whoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head if any hand be upon him. But if thou utter this our business, then we shall be guiltless of thine oath which thou have made us to swear. And she said, According to your words, so be it.

“And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet line in the window. And they went, and came to the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned. And the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but did not find them.

**“Then the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun. And they told him all that had befallen them. And they said to Joshua, Truly Jehovah has delivered into our hands all the land, and moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt away before us”** (Joshua 2:1-24).

Although Rahab was a harlot she was not a wicked woman. In some sinful countries it is not uncommon to take girls from their youth and make them harlots. Harlotry was considered just another occupation to entertain men. Rahab had been reared in that evil world, but she had a good heart. And she no doubt quit being a harlot, because Jehovah hates harlotry.

## The faith of many others

- **And what shall I say further? For the time would fail me telling about Gideon, also Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets, who, through faith, conquered kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, closed the mouths of lions, quenched the force of fire, escaped the jaw of the sword** (Hebrews 11:32-34).

The stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are all told in the book of Judges. Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah at different times led armies to fight against nations that were oppressing Israel. Samson was the strongest man who ever lived, and he fought against the Philistines who were oppressing the people of Israel.

Gideon fought against the Midianites. Here is what the Bible record says about how they were oppressing Israel: **“And the sons of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of Midian the sons of Israel made for themselves the dens which are in the mountains, and the caves, and the strongholds.**

**“And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the sons of the east, they came up against them. And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come to Gaza, and left no sustenance in Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor donkey. For they came up with their cattle and their tents. They came in as locusts for multitude. Both they and their camels were without number, and they came into the land to destroy it”** (Judges 6:1-5).

Deborah was a prophetess who judged Israel at the time of Barak. And she told him that Jehovah commanded him to fight against Sisera the captain of the army of Jabin king of Canaan who was oppressing Israel.

Here is what the record says about him: **“And the sons of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, when Ehud was dead. And Jehovah sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor, the captain of whose army was Sisera who dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the sons of Israel cried to Jehovah, for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and he mightily oppressed the sons of Israel twenty years”** (Judges 4:1-3).

The strong man Samson fought as an individual against the Philistines who were oppressing Israel. Here is what the Bible says about them: **“And the sons of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years”** (Judges 13:1). Samson once killed a thousand of them with only the jawbone of a donkey.

Jephthah fought against the Ammonites who were oppressing Israel. Here is what the Bible says about how they distressed the people of Israel: **“And the sons of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baalim, and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Sidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook Jehovah, and did not serve him.**

**“And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the sons of Ammon. And they vexed and oppressed the sons of Israel that year. Eighteen years they oppressed all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. And the sons of Ammon passed over the Jordan to also fight against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was exceedingly distressed.**

**“And the sons of Israel cried to Jehovah, saying, We have sinned against thee, even because we have forsaken our God, and have served the Baalim. And Jehovah said to the sons of Israel, Did not I save you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the sons of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, oppressed you. And ye cried to me, and I saved you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods. Therefore I will save you no more. Go and cry to the gods which ye have chosen. Let them save you in the time of your distress.**

**“And the sons of Israel said to Jehovah, We have sinned. Do thou to us whatever seems good to thee, only deliver us, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the foreign gods from among them, and served Jehovah. And his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel”** (Judges 10:6-16).

Notice how the passage says that the soul of Jehovah **“was grieved for the misery of Israel.”** God grieves with his people when they grieve, even though they deserve it. Let no man say that God does not suffer because of our sins.

David is the most famous of the men who fought against the enemies of Israel. God even made him the king of his people. There is much in the Bible about David.

Samuel was a prophet and the judge of Israel at the time when the people clamored for a king. Here is that story: **“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. Now therefore hearken to their voice. However thou shalt protest solemnly to them, and shall show them the manner of the king who shall reign over them.**

**“And Samuel told all the words of Jehovah to the people who asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king who shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them to him for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and they shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint them to him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties. And he will set some to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots.**

**“And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks.**

**“And ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king whom ye shall have chosen you, and Jehovah will not answer you in that day.**

**“But the people refused to hearken to the voice of Samuel. And they said, No, but we will have a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (First Samuel 8:4-20).**

The Bible tells about many prophets that Jehovah sent to his people to teach them, and to admonish them, and to rebuke them. Much of the Bible is about the prophets of God, and the entire Bible was written by them. And all of their mighty works were done through faith.

The faith of the warriors conquered kingdoms. The faith of every man of God works righteousness of some kind. It is through our faith that we obtain the promises of God. It was the faith of Daniel that closed the mouths of the lions (see Daniel 6).

The following passage tells how the faith of Moses quenched the force of fire: **“And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the ears of Jehovah. And when Jehovah heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of Jehovah burnt among them, and devoured in the outermost part of the camp. And the people cried to Moses. And Moses prayed to Jehovah, and the fire abated” (Numbers 11:1-2).**

The Bible tells how many of the people of God escaped the jaw of the sword because of their faith. The famous story of David and Goliath is one of them. Here is what David said to king Saul when he tried to discourage him from fighting Goliath: **“And David said to Saul, Thy servant was keeping his father’s sheep, and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth. And when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and killed him. Thy servant smote both the lion and the bear,**

and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.

**“And David said, Jehovah who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Go, and Jehovah shall be with thee”** (First Samuel 17:34-37).

We who believe in God live by our faith in him. As Paul said, we walk by faith, not by sight: **“Therefore always being confident, and knowing that while at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight”** (Second Corinthians 5:6-7).

## Out of weakness were made strong

- **Out of weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, bowed down armies of aliens** (Hebrews 11:34).

Here is how the weakness of Gideon was made strong: **“And the agent of Jehovah came, and sat under the oak which was in Ophrah that pertained to Joash the Abiezrite. And his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the agent of Jehovah appeared to him, and said to him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.**

**“And Gideon said to him, Oh, my lord, if Jehovah is with us, then why has all this befallen us? And where are all his wondrous works which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not Jehovah bring us up from Egypt? But now Jehovah has cast us off, and delivered us into the hand of Midian.**

**“And Jehovah looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent thee? And he said to him, Oh, Lord, with what shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And Jehovah said to him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shall smite the Midianites as one man”** (Judges 6:11-16).

Gideon said his family was the poorest in (the tribe of) Manasseh and he was the least in his father’s house. Yet God did use him to become mighty in war, and to bow down the army of the Midianites, because of the faith of Gideon.

Not much is said in the Bible about the man Barak, and so we do not know about his weakness. We are told how he would not go to battle against the enemies of Israel unless the prophetess Deborah went with him. Here is the story about that:

**“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill-country of Ephraim, and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, Has not Jehovah, the God of Israel, commanded, saying, Go and approach to mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun? And I will draw Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, to thee, to the river Kishon, with his chariots and his multitude, and I will deliver him into thy hand.**

**“And Barak said to her, If thou will go with me, then I will go, but if thou will not go with me, I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee. Notwithstanding, the journey that thou take shall not be for thine honor, for Jehovah will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh”** (Judges 4:4-9).

Barak was a weak man in refusing to go to battle without Deborah being with him, even if he was not weak in any other way. Nevertheless, Barak did become mighty in war, and bowed down the army that was oppressing Israel, defeating them.

Samson was a man who was chosen by God from birth to become very strong. Here is that story: **“And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren, and did not bear. And the agent of Jehovah appeared to the woman, and said to her, Behold now, thou are barren, and do not bear, but thou shall conceive, and bear a son.**

**“Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink no wine nor strong drink, and do not eat any unclean thing, for, lo, thou shall conceive, and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb. And he shall begin to save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”** (Judges 13:2-5).

After many victories against the Philistines, Samson foolishly revealed the secret of his strength to a woman, which was his long hair. Bribed by the Philistines, she cut off his hair while he slept. Then the Philistines captured him and put out his eyes to make him blind. Samson was an ordinary man out of whose weakness was made supernaturally strong so that he could become mighty in war, and bow down the armies of the Philistines.

The following passage tells the story of how Jephthah was made strong out of weakness: **“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a harlot, and Gilead begot Jephthah. And Gilead’s wife bore sons to him. And when his wife’s sons grew up, they drove out Jephthah, and said to him, Thou shall not inherit in our father’s house, for thou are the son of another woman. Then Jephthah fled from his brothers, and dwelt in the land of Tob. And vain fellows were gathered to Jephthah, and they went out with him.**

**“And it came to pass after a while, that the sons of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that, when the sons of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob. And they said to Jephthah, Come and be our chief, that we may fight with the sons of Ammon.**

**“And Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, Did ye not hate me, and drive me out of my father’s house? And why have ye come to me now when ye are in distress? And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, For that reason we turned again to thee now, that thou may go with us, and fight with the sons of Ammon. And thou shall be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. And Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight with the sons of Ammon, and Jehovah delivers them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, Jehovah shall be witness between us. Surely according to thy word so will we do.**

**“Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before Jehovah in Mizpah. ...**

**Then the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over to the sons of Ammon”** (Judges 11:1-11, 29).

## A superior resurrection

- **Women took hold of their dead from a resurrection, but others were tortured, not having accepted deliverance, so that they might experience a superior resurrection** (Hebrews 11:35).

That passage speaks of two different kinds of resurrection. The first kind is figurative about the body of our flesh. The second is kind is literal about our divine spirit.

When the author said that women took hold of their dead from a resurrection, he was referring to their earthly lives escaping the penalty of death. That means some women received back those who had been condemned to death. They escaped death because they accepted deliverance, which required them to deny God.

Notice how the author contrasted those who were resurrected from the dead in that figurative sense, with those who would not accept deliverance, even though they were tortured. They would not accept deliverance because they would not deny God. And they would not deny God so that they might experience a superior resurrection, one which gives us eternal life in heaven.

## Their severe persecutions

- **And others took a trial of mockings and scourgings, and moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed apart, they were tempted, they died in murder by sword. They wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, restricted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth** (Hebrews 11:36-38).

After listing some examples of men who lived by faith, the author told how they suffered. He said they **“were tortured, not having accepted deliverance.”** It takes very strong faith to endure being tortured when you are offered deliverance to deny God.

Not many of us will ever experience being tortured because of our faith. But there are many other ways to test our faith. The author named ten other ways that men of faith have suffered, which I list below. He said they

took a trial of mockings and scourgings  
 [took a trial] of bonds and imprisonment  
 were stoned  
 were sawed apart  
 were tempted  
 died in murder by sword  
 wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins  
 were destitute

were restricted  
were tormented  
wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth

Taking a trial of mockings and scourgings is a form of torture. Those faithful souls first had to endure a pseudo-trial that involved mocking them and their faith. Then they were condemned and scourged. A scourging involves being beaten severely with some kind of whip or rod. The law of Moses condemned that kind of punishment (see Deuteronomy 25:2-3), but sinners care nothing about God's will.

The author also said those men of faith suffered bonds and imprisonment. Peter and Paul often suffered bonds and imprisonment. The story of the prophet Jeremiah tells of how he suffered a particularly cruel form of bondage: **“Then they took Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son, that was in the court of the guard. And they let Jeremiah down with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire”** (Jeremiah 38:6).

The righteous man Stephen was stoned to death because of his faith in Christ. And the following passage tells how Paul was stoned because of his faith: **“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 14:19-20).

There is nothing in the Bible record of anyone being sawed apart. However, since the author of the book of Hebrews told of it, that means it happened. For the book of Hebrews is part of the inspired word of God. The author may have mentioned being sawed apart to show the extreme cruelty to which those who have faith in God will be treated, although few of us will ever experience such cruelty.

Regarding temptations, they vary greatly in kind and degree, but we all experience them throughout our lives. There is not a day that goes by when we are not faced with choices about doing right or wrong. This whole life involves a continual struggle between good and evil. For evil is like the force of gravity that we must continually resist to keep from falling.

Righteous souls develop the habit of doing right. Nevertheless, Paul warned, **“Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall. No temptation has taken you except is common to man. But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what ye are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, to enable you to endure”** (First Corinthians 10:12-13).

The author next says that those men of faith died in murder by sword. Being murdered means being killed unjustly in the sight of God. And to die by sword is a violent way to perish. Hence, with those words the author is saying they were violently slain unjustly. That is just another example of the extreme persecutions men of faith have suffered.

Wandering about means they suffered extreme rejection by the world. Having to wander about meant there was no place where they were accepted. And the more faithful we are to God and his holy word, the less we are going to be accepted by the world.

Being clothed in sheepskins and goatskins is only done by those who live outside of civilization. Thus, those words symbolize our separation from the world, a kind of outcast separation. We are outcast in the sense that we do not belong to the world and they hate us.

Men of faith have suffered being destitute, being restricted, and being tormented. How much of those things and to what extreme, has of course, varied. Being destitute means being without or lacking. Every man of faith has experienced having to do without or lacking things that the world has. Some men of faith have suffered extreme destitution. Many of the prophets of the Old Testament were destitute.

Regarding restriction, every man who has faith in God is going to be restricted in some ways. We cannot join the world in their loose living. Therefore, we must restrict ourselves about some things. However, because the world hates us, we who have faith in God are forced to experience even more restrictions.

A classic modern example of being restricted is how those who believe that the world was created by God instead of by evolution are treated. Scientists of faith cannot publish, professors of faith cannot teach, and graduate students of faith are not accepted for enrollment when they reject the theory of evolution—not as long as they proclaim their faith.

The author also said that men of faith were tormented. Suffering physical abuse is one way of being tormented. Experiencing the frustration of restrictions is another kind of torment. Being scoffed and rejected in another kind. Every man who has faith in God will be tormented by sinners in some kind of way. Remember how Jesus warned his apostles about how they would be tormented (see Luke 21:12).

The author also said that some men of faith were forced to wander in deserts and mountains and caves, and in the holes of the earth. The following passage tells how prophets of God were forced to hid in a cave: **“And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared Jehovah greatly; for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of Jehovah, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifties in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.)”** (First Kings 18:3-4).

And the following passage tells how the prophet Elijah was forced to flee to a cave: **“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and also how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life. ... And he came to a cave there, and lodged there. And, behold, the word of Jehovah came to him, and he said to him, What are thou doing here, Elijah?”** (First Kings 19:1-9).

### Well reported through their faith

- **And all these, having been well reported through faith, did not receive the promise, God having foreseen something superior concerning us, so that without us they would not be made fully perfect** (Hebrews 11:39-40).

The promise that the author mentioned was Christ and the kingdom of God. That was the great promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christ and the kingdom of God is

the “**something superior**” that God foresaw concerning us. It is vastly superior to anything upon the earth, because it promises us eternal salvation in heaven.

That fabulous promise could not have been fulfilled without Christ’s life of perfect obedience to God here in the world. That way he earned the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins, and make us members of the kingdom of God. It also enabled him to redeem all the righteous souls who lived before him. Hence, those great men of faith who lived before Christ also became a part of the kingdom of God, being made fully perfect with us.

## Run by perseverance the contest

- **Therefore we also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, having put off every weight and cleverly entangling sin, let us run by perseverance the contest being set before us** (Hebrews 12:1).

The great cloud of witnesses surrounding us refers to all those men and women of faith who lived before us. They are wonderful examples for us providing testimony of the power of faith. For faith in our heavenly Father can enable us to endure every trial and tribulation. When we must suffer for the cause of Christ we can look back to how they suffered. And their endurance will testify to us how we too can endure. We can endure because we know that God is with us, and will take our souls to be with him in heaven.

Therefore we must put off every weight and cleverly entangling sin. A weight is something that would force us down. The author said we must put off every weight. He means we must put away everything that would pressure us or drag us down into disobedience.

Cleverly entangling sins are those that are skillfully crafted to entangle us in disobedience. The modern entertainment business is filled with skillfully crafted sins. They are skillfully crafted to make sin seem harmless and fun, even right and just. We must put away and resist every such thing because they would entangle us in evil and destructiveness.

We must run by perseverance the contest being set before us. A contest is a conflict and a struggle. Our conflict and struggle is with sin and wickedness. Indeed, this world is the center of a great cosmic war between the forces of good and the forces of evil. For this world is where God and his great adversary Satan are in a conflict and struggle for the souls of men.

And there can be no neutrality. For Jesus said, “**He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters**” (Matthew 12:30). We who have faith in God and Christ have that great contest set before us. Each one of us must engage in that conflict and struggle to promote truth and righteousness, and opposes sin and wickedness. And if we want to be rewarded with eternal sonship with God in heaven, then we must run by perseverance that contest being set before us.

## Jesus the Pathfinder and perfecter of the faith

- **Looking to Jesus the Pathfinder and perfecter of the faith, who, against the joy set before him, endured a cross, having despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God** (Hebrews 12:2).

A pathfinder is somebody who creates a new way. And Jesus is the Pathfinder who created the way of salvation for our souls. Moreover, he is the perfecter of the faith. Our faith alone cannot save us. We all need to be redeemed from the condemnation of our sins. Therefore, when Jesus became our Redeemer, he perfected our faith. He became the perfecter of the faith.

The joy set before him was the knowledge that he would be able to redeem our souls if he obeyed God perfectly even to the point of a death on a cross. It was joy to him not only to obey the Father completely, but also to be able to redeem us. Therefore, he endured a cross.

He endured it, but he despised the shame. He did not deserve any shame, but his enemies forced it upon him. They had him executed on a cross as a criminal. And being executed naked on a cross as a criminal was a shameful thing to any man. Being naked in public is shameful enough. But Jesus despised that shame especially because it gave the impression he was an evildoer. And Jesus hates evildoing.

Nevertheless, he endured a cross, and consequently has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. He is there because he proved his moral and spiritual superiority. He alone deserves to sit at the right hand of the throne of God. And because he redeems us who belong to him, making us righteous before God, we will sit with him in his throne.

However, we must persevere and remain faithful, overcoming every obstacle to our faith. For Jesus 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).

## Hostility by sinners

- **For consider the man who endured such hostility against him by sinners, so that ye may not be weary in your souls, being disheartened. Ye have not yet resisted as far as blood, struggling against sin** (Hebrews 12:3-4).

As disciples of Christ we are going to suffer many things for him. For Paul said **“that it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). And those tribulations are going to include hostilities against us by sinners. Therefore, the author of Hebrews said we should consider the man Jesus who endured such hostility against him by sinners. He is our perfect example, not only of obeying all the commands of God, but also of enduring the hostilities and tribulations of this world.

By remembering how Jesus endured, that will help us to not be weary in our souls, being disheartened. Our bodies will indeed groan and be weary, but our spirits can rejoice knowing the hope that is set before us. The example of our Lord will help us to not become disheartened. Being disheartened means losing courage and enthusiasm. And when we consider how Jesus endured that will help us to not lose courage and enthusiasm.

Remember what the author said about a righteous man withdrawing: **“But the righteous man will live from faith, and if he should withdraw, my soul is not pleased with him. But we are not of retreat for destruction, but of faith for the preservation of the soul”** (Hebrews 10:38-39).

Jesus resisted as far as blood; he resisted as far as a violent death. He endured and remained faithful to God. Very few of us will need to endure such hostility in our struggle against sin. We will not need to resist as far as blood. Therefore, all the more we should not be weary in our souls and be disheartened. Thank God we do not need to endure such hostility against us by sinners in our struggle against sin.

## The Lord's chastening

- **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).**

The exhortation mentioned above is from the book of Proverbs: **“My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah, nor be weary of his reproof. For whom Jehovah loves he improves, and he whips every son whom he receives”** (Proverbs 3:11-12).

Every loving father will chasten his son when he needs it. And every loving father will whip his son when he deserves it. This generation of Americans, dominated by the evil ideology of humanism, has virtually outlawed corporal punishment. However, the word of God still encourages parents to use it when their children need it.

For examples, Solomon said, **“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly”** (Proverbs 13:24), and, **“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying”** (Proverbs 19:18). A wise parent will still use corporal punishment (discretely and prudently) when needed, even if it is against the law of the land. The will of God is our guide.

Therefore, we should not disparage the chastening of the Lord, nor become disheartened when punished by him. Of course, we also need to know whether we are being chastened by him, or are being persecuted by the devil. Solomon also said, **“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider”** (Ecclesiastes 7:14). In the day of adversity consider if there are things we have done that need chastening by the Lord. And if there are, then we should confess them and repent, and be glad that the Lord is treating us as sons.

## Treating you as with sons

- **Because of chastening ye endure; God is treating you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? And if ye are without chastening, of which all have become participants, then ye are bastards, and not sons (Hebrews 12:7-8).**

We endure through chastening because it is through the discipline of chastening that we are trained to do right. And unless we live right we cannot endure; we will lose our souls. For Solomon also said, **“Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from Sheol”** (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Chastening delivers our souls from death by training us to turn from evil. For the natural inclination of our bodies is to do evil. As Solomon also said, **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him”** (Proverbs 22:15). A child without the chastening of discipline is driven by the foolishness in his heart.

Paul used the example of bastards to show how we must be chastened. Bastards are children that are born outside of marriage without fathers to chasten them to live right. Such children are commonly unruly and wild because they have no fathers to chasten them. The rise of lawless gangs of young men in modern America is because they have no fathers. And foolish fathers who will not chasten their sons are treating them like bastards.

### Chastening by earthly fathers

- **Besides, we indeed have had chastisers—the fathers of our flesh—and we were turned around. Shall we not much more be subordinate to the Father of the spirits, and we will live? For those men indeed for a few days chastened us according to that which seemed good to them, but he for that which is advantageous, in order to be partakers of his holiness** (Hebrews 12:9-10).

Fathers who chasten their children properly turn them around from the foolishness that is bound in their hearts. Any father who will not chasten his son hates him, because Solomon said, **“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly”** (Proverbs 13:24). Fathers who love their sons chasten them. And Solomon said they chasten them promptly, because delayed chastening is more than useless, it is actually harmful.

And since the chastening of earthly fathers is good and beneficial for their sons, we should much more be subordinate to the father of the spirits. For it is through him that our spirits can live and not suffer the second death of hell. Therefore we should be grateful when God chastens us, because that indicates he is treating us as beloved sons.

Our earthly fathers chastened us according to that which seemed good to them. They used their judgment based upon their limited human knowledge and wisdom. However, God has all knowledge and wisdom, and he chastens us when we truly need it, when it is advantageous for us, so that we can be partakers of his holiness.

God is using our lives in this world to test our souls, to see who is worthy of becoming his sons for eternity in heaven with him. And when we accept and endure his chastening, that makes us more righteous. It makes us worthy of being partakers of his holiness. It makes us worthy of becoming his sons for eternity.

### The fruit of chastening

- **But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it** (Hebrews 12:11).

No man enjoys being chastened, because it causes pain and sorrow. I will never forget something that happened when my granddaughter was about four years old. She apparently had just heard the word stupid used on a TV show. Not knowing what it meant, she came into another room where the rest of us were all gathered, and she called someone there stupid.

Her parents immediately rebuked her for saying it. She first had the look of shock on her face, followed by a frown. Then she began to cry. That was when we explained to her what the word stupid means. I have never again heard her use that word for anyone in her family. We did not need to use corporal punishment on her for that infraction. A simple rebuke was sufficient chastening for her.

I am exceedingly grateful to my beloved father and mother for chastening me when I was a child. They were strict disciplinarians, and they did not spare the rod when I needed it. They taught me to love truth and righteousness. And because of my beloved parents, and because of my most beloved heavenly Father, I have been able to work to produce peaceable fruit of righteousness.

### Lift up the drooping hands

- **Therefore lift up the drooping hands, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be turned away, but may be healed instead** (Hebrews 12:12-13).

In this latter part of his book, the author of Hebrews first wrote about suffering for the cause of Christ and his righteousness. Then he wrote about suffering because of being chastened. We suffer in this life both when we are innocent and when we are guilty. We should strive to alleviate the suffering of the innocent when we are able.

When you suffer because you are guilty, the author said that you need to **“lift up the drooping hands, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be turned away, but may be healed instead.”**

Instead of becoming depressed about our guilt, we should muster our strength to correct ourselves. We should turn away from the cause of our guilt, and lift up our drooping hands, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for our feet. Making straight paths for our feet means to walk in the way of righteousness.

And when we walk in righteousness, then what is lame may not be turned away, but may be healed instead. That means we must use our righteousness to correct and amend things that are wrong about us. We cannot ignore and turn away from the things that are wrong about us. They must be amended.

When we are chastened it is because there are things wrong about us. And God does not want us to feel defeated when we are chastened. He wants us to be aroused to repent and fix what is wrong in our lives. Remember this admonition: **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21). And that includes overcoming the evil things of ourselves. We can overcome them and heal them by repenting and doing good, not by feeling defeated and becoming depressed.

When you are chastened by the Lord, lift up the drooping hands, and the feeble knees, repent and do goodness and righteousness.

## Pursue peace and sanctification

- **Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man will see the Lord** (Hebrews 12:14).

Peace is the absence of conflict and strife. Conflict and strife are destructive, which is why we should pursue peace with all men. Remember however, we cannot use pacifism to achieve peace, because pacifism is surrendering. And we must never surrender to evil. Therefore, pursuing peace includes combating evil. For there can be no real peace with evil.

The prophet Isaiah called Christ the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). Remember however, what Jesus said about peace: **“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).

The conflict and strife that Jesus was speaking about in that passage is spiritual. For the sword he came to spread is the word of God. Paul told of that when he admonished us to **“take ye up the full armor of God”** (Ephesians 6:13). He said, **“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17).

We pursue peace with all men by promoting truth and righteousness, and opposing sin and deceit. That is the only way genuine peace can be achieved. Christ is the Prince of Peace because peace is his ultimate goal. Peace is like health. No man can have good health if he tolerates disease in himself, because the only way to be healthy is to eliminate disease. And our pursuit of peace with all men must include eliminating sin and deceit.

Sanctification refers to being set apart as pure and holy. That is why we the disciples of Christ are called of God. For example, Paul said in his letter to the Romans, **“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).

We become sanctified by God when we accept the invitation of Christ. And to remain sanctified we must remain set apart from the sinful world, and remain pure and holy. That is the only way we can become sons of God for eternity in heaven. As the author of Hebrews said, without sanctification **“no man will see the Lord.”** Therefore, keep yourself apart from the world, and remain pure and holy.

## Looking carefully lest

- **Looking carefully lest any man fall short, away from the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness sprouting up would cause trouble, and by this many may be defiled, lest a fornicator or profane man like Esau, who, in place of one meal sold his birthright. For ye also know that wanting afterward to**

**inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though having sought it with tears** (Hebrews 12:15-17).

In that passage the author warned us to look carefully lest we fall short, away from the grace of God. Living righteously in this sinful world is a continuing struggle. Virtually every day we face decisions about doing something right or not. Relaxing our vigilance will cause us to fall short, away from the grace of God.

Jesus spoke about how the righteousness of men varies in degree, when he said, **“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 5:20). The scholars and Pharisees were righteous to some extent. They did some things right. However, their righteousness fell short, away from the grace of God. And the author of Hebrews warned us against falling short, because we too can still be lost. The popular doctrine of once-saved-always-saved is a false one.

The author also spoke of a root of bitterness sprouting up and causing trouble, and by that many may be defiled. His use of the word bitterness refers to feelings of resentment and hatred. There are many things in this troubled world that can cause feelings of bitterness. Persecution and oppression, injustice and deceit, are just a few things that can cause bitterness.

Nevertheless, we should never let a root of bitterness sprout up in us. Jesus was never bitter about how he was treated. Peter and Paul were not bitter. The resentment and hatred of bitterness only cause trouble and defile people. Bitterness divides people, and causes them to do things that are not right. Just as quarreling tends to multiply, so also bitterness promotes more bitterness. Just as with quarreling, bitterness provokes people to act rashly and destructively.

Therefore, we must fight against any root of bitterness sprouting up in us. And the way that is done is to put our faith in God and his justice. As long as we trust God that justice and righteousness will eventually be done, then we will not be bitter. Moreover, if we have the kind of understanding and forgiving spirit that God has we will not be bitter.

The author also warned against falling short and becoming a fornicator or a profane man. The satisfaction of our sexual appetite must be restrained and controlled. Fornication is indulging in sexual intimacy unrestrained. Committing fornication is like living as the beasts of the earth; it is uncivilized and barbaric.

Being profane is showing disrespect and contempt for things that are holy and sacred. Fornicators are profane men, because they do not respect God’s commands about sexual intimacy.

The author used the example of Esau as a profane man but not a fornicator. Esau was profane because he despised his birthright, which was a blessing given him by God. Here is how that happened: **“And the boys grew. And Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field. And Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. Now Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his venison. And Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob boiled pottage. And Esau came in from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint. Therefore his name was called Edom [edom means red].**

**“And Jacob said, First sell me thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am about to die, and what profit shall the birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me first. And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils. And he ate and drank, and rose up, and went his way. So Esau despised his birthright”** (Genesis 25:27-34).

Apparently in the sight of God, part of Esau’s birthright included the blessing of his father Isaac, because he lost that also. Remember, urged by his mother Rebekah, Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him Esau’s blessing. Then immediately afterward Esau came to receive the blessing.

Here again is that story: **“And Isaac his father said to him, Who are thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn, Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who then is he who has taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou came, and have blessed him? Yea, he shall be blessed.**

**“When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with guile, and has taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly name Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and, behold, now he has taken away my blessing.**

**“And he said, Have thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said to Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. And what then shall I do for thee, my son? And Esau said to his father, Have thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.**

**“And Isaac his father answered and said to him, Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling, and of the dew of heaven from above. And by thy sword thou shall live, and thou shall serve thy brother. And it shall come to pass, when thou shall break loose, that thou shall shake his yoke from off thy neck. And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him”** (Genesis 27:32-41).

According to the author of Hebrews, Esau was rejected by God from receiving the blessing because he sold his birthright. Therefore, Esau would not have received the blessing even if Jacob had not deceived his father Isaac. God would have found another way for Esau to be rejected.

The lesson in that story is that if we sell our heavenly birthright for the vain things of this life, we too will be rejected from the blessing of heaven. And no amount of tears and pleading will bring it back. No amount of repentance in the afterlife will bring it back if we reject Christ in this life.

Remember the word of Jesus: **“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 13:49-50).

## The terrifying mountain

- **For ye have not come to a mountain being felt, and which burned with fire, and to darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of words, of which those who heard begged that a word not be added to them. For they did not bear that which was commanded, if even a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned. And so fearful was that which was made visible, that Moses said, I am terrified and trembling (Hebrews 12:18-21).**

Jehovah himself spoke the ten commandments with a mighty voice from mount Sinai to his people Israel. Here is what happened after the people heard his voice: **“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.**

**“And Moses said to the people, Fear not, for God has come to prove you, and that his fear may be before you, that ye not sin. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was” (Exodus 20:18-21).**

Hearing the voice of God from the mountain was so terrifying that not only the people trembled, but even Moses, who had been so close to God, was terrified and trembled. The people were so terrified that they begged to hear his voice no more. They were afraid they would die.

The record in Hebrews says that after hearing Jehovah speak the ten commandments to them, the people **“begged [Moses] that a word not be added to them.”** Not only were they terrified of the mighty voice of God, but **“they did not bear that which was commanded.”** The command was that **“if even a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned.”**

That was a very strict command with a severe penalty for violation. The author said the people did not bear it. That means they thought the command was too strict and severe. And that has been the attitude of mankind from the beginning. The world thinks most of God’s commands are too strict and severe.

Consider these words from the second psalm: **“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).**

The nations rage against God and his Christ, because they think his commands are bonds and cords around them. Therefore they will not bear them. For example, they have never liked the death penalty he commanded for those who commit blasphemy or adultery. Now they even oppose the death penalty for murderers. And the history of those ancient sons of Israel show how little they obeyed God’s commands for them. The Old Testament is saturated with examples of their disobedience, and with God urging through his prophets for them to repent and obey.

## Coming to the city of a living God

- **But ye have come to mount Zion, and to the city of a living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of agents, to a festal gathering and assembly of firstborn sons who were enrolled in the heavens, and to God, a Judge of all, and to spirits of righteous men who were made fully perfect, and to Jesus a mediator of a new covenant, and to blood of sprinkling that speaks better than Abel** (Hebrews 12:22-24).

After the author said we had not come to a quaking mountain burning with fire, nor to darkness and gloom and a tempest, nor to a sound of a trumpet, and a voice of words that terrified those who heard it, he then told to what we have come:

to mount Zion  
 to the city of a living God, a heavenly Jerusalem  
 to myriads of agents  
 to a festal gathering and assembly of firstborn sons who were enrolled in the heavens  
 to God, a Judge of all  
 to spirits of righteous men who were made fully perfect  
 to Jesus a mediator of a new covenant  
 to blood of sprinkling that speaks better than Abel

Mound Zion first referred to a mountain upon which was the city of Jerusalem. It later referred to the mountain upon which was built the temple of God. It finally referred to all of Jerusalem itself. The mount Zion mentioned in the above passage from Hebrews refers to the location of the heavenly Jerusalem. That is where all the faithful disciples of Christ will be gathered together in the new heaven and earth after this world is over.

The author also speaks of our coming to myriads of agents, to a great festal gathering and assembly of firstborn sons who were enrolled in the heavens. The heavenly world is populated by a mighty host of agents of God. And that is the world to which we are coming.

We are also coming to a great festal gathering and assembly there, a gathering and assembly of firstborn sons who were enrolled in the heavens. We who belong to Christ have been adopted as firstborn sons of God, firstborn in spirit. We are considered firstborn because we will inherit the kingdom of God in heaven (in Bible times firstborn sons received the greater inheritance). And we are enrolled in heaven because our names are written in the book of life. And our gathering and assembly there will be a festal one, filled with joyous celebration.

We will also come to God, a Judge of all, and to spirits of righteous men who were made fully perfect. God will judge all men by how they have lived in this life. We who have loved Christ and obeyed him will rejoice at his judgments, because they will be blessings for us. They will be blessings for us because we are the spirits of righteous men who were made fully perfect. Jesus Christ the Son of God made us fully perfect by redeeming us from the condemnation of our sins. Only he could make us fully perfect.

We also come to Jesus because he also became a mediator of a new covenant for us. That new covenant is his good news of our salvation. We come to him and belong to him

through our faith and obedience to him. Therefore, he mediates between God and us, and he does it through the new covenant. By his mediation he reconciles us to God.

We have also come to **“blood of sprinkling that speaks better than Abel.”** The atonement of sin had always been done by the sprinkling of the blood of animal sacrifices. Abel was the first man who offered a blood sacrifice. The blood of Christ was the final and perfect sacrifice. The blood of Christ speaks better than Abel because it was the perfect sacrifice that atones for the sins of every righteous man who ever lived, or who will ever live.

### Do not refuse him who speaks

- **Watch, that ye not refuse him who speaks. For if those men did not escape, having refused him who spoke a divine message on earth, much more we, those who turn away from him from the heavens, whose voice then shook the earth** (Hebrews 12:25-26).

The ancient Israelites were those men that refused Moses who spoke a divine message to them. The divine message was the old covenant of the law of Moses. And those men did not escape their punishment for having refused to obey God who gave them that divine message. They were cursed to die in the wilderness. Only their children were allowed to survive to enter into the promised land.

**“Him from the heavens”** is Jesus Christ. And it was he whose voice then shook the earth. For Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament. Remember what Paul said about that: **“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. 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”** (First Corinthians 10:3-6).

Jehovah was the voice that then shook the earth. He was also the rock that followed them. And Paul said **“the rock was the Christ.”** Christ is the man from the heavens who spoke a divine message to us. Consequently, we will no more escape the wrath of God if we turn away from him than did those ancient Israelites. Indeed, the passage in Hebrews says God’s wrath will be “much more.”

### Shaking both earth and heaven

- **But now he has promised, saying, Yet once, I shake not only the earth, but also the heaven. And the, Yet once, signifies the removal of the things being shaken—as of things that were made—so that the things not being shaken may remain.**
- **Therefore, receiving an immovable kingdom, we may have grace, through which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and awe** (Hebrews 12:26-28).

Shaking the earth and the heaven refers to their removal. Peter wrote about that, 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. Therefore, all these things being disintegrated, what kind ought ye to be in holy actions and pieties, anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of God, by which the heavens, being made fiery hot, will be disintegrated, and the elements dissolve, being intensely hot? But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells” (Second Peter 3:10-13).

The apostle John told about seeing the new heaven and earth in his great vision of heaven: **“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”** (Revelation 21:1). He also said, **“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”** (Revelation 21:5). Those words are true and faithful because, as the author of Hebrews said, **“... he has promised.”**

The old heaven and earth will be shaken (removed) because they are things that were made. However, the things not being shaken will remain. Those things not being shaken refer to us as the disciples of Christ. We will remain because we are not things that were made.

Our bodies of flesh were made, and they will also be removed. But our divine spirits came from God himself as his offspring. Therefore, they remain after the removal of the old earth and the old heaven. And we who belong to Christ in his church will receive the **“immovable kingdom,”** which will be in the new heaven and earth.

Therefore, as the author of Hebrews said, **“... we may have grace, through which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and awe.”** Our salvation, with its promise of the immovable kingdom, is by the grace of God. It is a gift that no man can earn. And it is given to all who believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

And it is through God’s wonderful grace that we may serve him acceptably with reverence and awe. For without that grace no man can serve God acceptably. Therefore, as faithful disciples of Christ, we must strive to serve him and his cause, bearing fruit in every good work. As Paul said, **“For you to walk worthily of the Lord for every desire to please, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened in every ability, according to the dominion of his glory, for all perseverance and longsuffering with joy”** (Colossians 1:10-11).

Moreover, we must serve him with reverence and awe. Reverence and awe refer to feelings and attitudes of the mind about something. We cannot serve God acceptably without having those kinds of feelings and attitudes in our heart about him. We must always think of him as supremely good and worthy of all our adoration. And we must always recognize and appreciate his ultimate power and authority. We cannot serve him acceptable without that kind of heart.

## A consuming fire

- **For our God is also a consuming fire** (Hebrews 12:29).

The author said that God is *also* a consuming fire. He is a consuming fire to those who hate him and rebel against him. But he is a loving Father to those who love and obey him.

Psalm 97 tells how he consumes his adversaries with fire, but preserves the souls of his sanctified and blesses them: **“Jehovah reigns! Let the earth rejoice. Let the multitude of isles be glad. Clouds and darkness are round about him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. A fire goes before him, and burns up his adversaries round about. His lightnings lightened the world. The earth saw, and trembled. The mountains melted like wax at the presence of Jehovah, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.**

**“The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the peoples have seen his glory. Let all those be put to shame who serve graven images, who boast themselves of idols. Bow yourselves to him, all ye gods. Zion heard and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of thy judgments, O Jehovah. For thou, Jehovah, are most high above all the earth. Thou are exalted far above all gods.**

**“O ye who love Jehovah, hate evil. He preserves the souls of his sanctified. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous man, and gladness for the upright in heart. Be glad in Jehovah, ye righteous, and give thanks to the memory of his holiness.”**

## Brotherly love

- **Let brotherly love abide** (Hebrews 13:1).

No man can be a faithful disciple of Christ without an abiding brotherly love in his heart. Remember what 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).

The apostle John wrote many things about love. Here is one thing he said about brotherly love: **“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”** (First John 4:7-8).

And our brotherly love should abide. It is not something that should ever vacillate or be unreliable. Our love for each other should be like a foundation rock, always supportive and steady. It should abide even when there is a need for rebuking and chastening. Remember, **“For whom the Lord loves he chastens”** (Hebrews 12:6).

Our love for each other should abide in times of plenty and in times of want. It should abide during joyful times and during sorrowful times. It should especially abide during times of tribulation and persecution. Our love for each other should be like God’s love for us—always abiding.

## Do not forget love for strangers

- **Do not forget love for strangers, for by this some lodged agents, unaware** (Hebrews 13:2).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul commanded us to pursue love for strangers (see Romans 12:13). And the author of Hebrews here commands us not to forget love for strangers. Remember, the reference to strangers includes foreigners as well as native peoples that are unfamiliar to us.

Remember also, love for strangers was even a command in the law of Moses: **“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). If we want to please God, it is important that we not forget love for strangers.

An example of lodging agents unaware is when Jehovah sent two of them to examine the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here is what happened when they arrived: **“And the two agents came to Sodom at evening, and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom. And Lot saw them, and rose up to meet them. And he bowed himself with his face to the earth, and he said, Behold now, my lords, turn aside, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your way.**

**“And they said, No, but we will abide in the street all night. And he urged them greatly. And they turned in to him, and entered into his house. And he made a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate”** (Genesis 19:1-3). Shortly after the men ate they revealed to Lot that they were agents who had been sent by God.

Whether agents from heaven have appeared to men after the time of the apostles I know not. They may still appear to some people that are unaware of who they are. But of one thing you can be sure: there is great danger in thinking an agent has appeared to you, because Paul said that **“Satan disguises himself into an agent of light”** (Second Corinthians 11:14). A man you may think is an agent from heaven may actually be the devil in disguise.

The best thing to do is never assume any stranger is an agent from heaven. We should love strangers whoever they are (except for the ones we know that are wicked). And if for some reason God sends one to us unaware, that is his business not ours. It is foolish and arrogant to assume he will send one to us, or to think he actually has. Be humble and do not look for such things. The lesson in this book is that we should love strangers, not look for heavenly agents.

We do not need to know about any visits of agents from heaven. Indeed, it is best we remain unaware. For we have God’s holy word available to us, and it is far more valuable than countless agents of heaven. It is the source of the good news we have from Christ. And no agent can ever say anything different. Remember this warning from Paul: **“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”** (Galatians 1:8).

## Remember the prisoners

- **Remember the prisoners as being in bondage together, those who are ill-treated as also yourselves being in the body** (Hebrews 13:3).

The prisoners mentioned in that passage refer to disciples of Christ who were imprisoned because of their faith and obedience to him. It was very common during the time of the early church for Christians to be imprisoned. In some parts of the world they are still persecuted that way, especially by Communists and Moslems. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity we should remember such prisoners and do what we can to help them.

The author even said we should remember them as being in bondage together. That means when a fellow disciple becomes a prisoner for his faith we should empathize with him such that we think of ourselves as being in bondage with him. Remember, we are all brothers of each other. Therefore, we should never forget the prisoners of Christ.

The author also said we should remember those who are ill-treated as also we ourselves are in the body. There are many ways we can be ill-treated because of our faith and obedience to Christ, besides being in bondage. And as long as we are in the body of flesh we are vulnerable to oppression by the devil and his disciples.

Remember what Peter said about being oppressed by the devil when he spoke to Cornelius the centurion. He said about Jesus that **“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 10:38). Therefore, we should remember those who are ill-treated as also ourselves being in the body. We should treat them as we would have ourselves treated.

The above passage in Hebrews does not refer to the criminals of the world. Criminals are not oppressed and ill-treated; they deserve being in bondage and punished (justly). Of course, that does not mean it would be wrong to teach any of them about Christ and his good news. Evangelizing them is a good work for some Christians.

However, it should always be recognized how deceitful and dangerous most of them are. Therefore, teaching them should be limited to well-trained disciples of Christ who understand them best. And it should never be done alone. It should always be done with at least two evangelists together as a safeguard against being deceived and manipulated.

## Marriage is precious in every way

- **Marriage is precious in every way, and the undefiled bed, but God will judge fornicators and adulterers** (Hebrews 13:4).

The author of the book of Hebrews said that marriage is precious in every way. Marriage is a precious thing because it helps prevent fornication. It is precious because through marriage new souls are brought into the world properly. Healthy marriages are a stabilizing influence on society. There are many ways that marriage is precious.

Nevertheless, there have been many believers in Christ who have said that marriage is *not* precious in every way, especially the rulers of the Roman Catholic Church. They have misinterpreted Paul's teachings, and they disparage marriage and the sexual intimacy of it. They have misinterpreted and perverted what the Bible teaches about marriage. When Paul discouraged marriage he said it was only **“because of the present distress”** (First Corinthians 7:26).

When the leaders of the Catholic church demean marriage, it helps keep the other members of that church subservient to them by presenting themselves as more holy and exalted because of their celibacy. They are like the Pharisees were.

The undefiled bed refers to sexual faithfulness. Adultery is what defiles the marriage bed. It defiles marriage so badly that Jesus said it was the only acceptable cause for divorce (see Matthew 5:32). Like fornication, adultery creates bastards. Moreover, adultery destroys the emotional bond of marriage. It destroys the love and trust of that oneness that makes it healthy and strong.

Therefore, God will judge fornicators and adulterers. That means he will punish them. He will punish them because they are destroyers of that precious union of a man and a woman. Although fornication in its narrow sense refers to unmarried sexual intimacy, it still defiles the marriage bed. It defiles it because past experiences of fornication prevent the full emotional unity of marriage. The memories of past sexual partners prevents the marriage bond from becoming perfect. That is another reason why it is so important to preserve virginity before marriage.

Nevertheless, adultery is the most deadly of those sins. The Bible is filled with warnings against adultery. Indeed, it was a capital crime in the law of Moses: **“And the man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, even he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death”** (Leviticus 20:10). And Solomon said, **“He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who would destroy his own soul does it. Wounds and dishonor he shall get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away”** (Proverbs 6:32-33).

## Be without love of money

- **The Way of life is to be without love of money, being content with the things that are present, for he has said, I will, no, not leave thee, and also, I will, no, not forsake thee. So then we have confidence to say, The Lord is a helper to me, and I will not fear. What will man do to me?** (Hebrews 13:5-6).

The Way of life refers to being a faithful disciple of Christ, and to obedience to the commands of his good news. It is very common to refer to the Way of life as Christianity. However, the Bible never uses the term Christianity. The Way of life, living according to the good news of Christ, is never called Christianity.

Having discovered that, I now rarely use the word Christianity. Instead of using the word Christianity I now prefer the expression “good news” when referring to the message of Christ and how he wants us to live. That is what Christ and his apostles called it. Besides, it is much more descriptive of what Christ brought us.

The expression **“the Way of life”** is only used in this passage, although it is called “the Way” five times in the book of Acts. It is also called the way of God, the way of the Lord, the way of truth, and the way of righteousness.

The author said the Way of life, living according to good news of Christ, is to be without love of money. It must be without love of money, because Paul said, **“For the love of**

**money is a root of all the evils, of which some aspiring have wandered from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows”** (First Timothy 6:10).

We should use whatever money we have wisely. And we should work to multiply what we have so that we can have the resources to bear fruit for God. Remember the parables of Jesus about men being given money to do business with (see Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27). The men who multiplied their money were praised for being good workers. What God condemns is the love of money.

Being content with things that are present is part of our faith in God. We trust what he says about never leaving us, or never forsaking us. Jehovah spoke those words to the sons of Israel when he commanded them to destroy the nations of their promised land. Those nations were **“greater and mightier”** (Deuteronomy 4:38) than they were. Hence, Jehovah said to his people, **“Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be frightened at them, for Jehovah thy God, he it is who goes with thee. He will not leave thee, nor forsake thee”** (Deuteronomy 31:6).

And although we cannot see God, he will always be with us as long as we are always with him. Those are very comforting and encouraging words; and we should never forget them. Each one of us should always have confidence to say, **“The Lord is a helper to me, and I will not fear. What will man do to me?”** Our God is King of kings and Lord of lords, and he can do anything. And since he loves us, we should fear nothing but him only.

The first part of the twenty-seventh psalm tells how we should not be afraid: **“Jehovah is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, even my adversaries and my foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, even then I will be confident”** (Psalm 27:1-3).

## Remember those who lead you

- **Remember those who lead you, men who spoke the word of God to you, of whom, carefully observing the outcome of their conduct, imitate the faith—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today, and into the ages** (Hebrews 13:7-8).

The men who lead us are the elders of the congregations (also called overseers). The word of God says that each congregation is to be led by appointed elders. Paul spoke of that in detail in his first letter to Timothy (see 1Ti 3:1-7) and in his letter to Titus (see Titus 1:5-9). One of the qualifications of elders is being **“apt to teach”** (see First Timothy 3:2). That means both being able to teach and being prepared for it.

Therefore, the elders were the men who knew the word of God and spoke it to the people. Remember, Bibles were not readily available before the invention of printing presses. Moreover, most people were illiterate anyway. Hence, people needed to have the word of God spoken to them. And that was an important function of those who led them. We are all ultimately to be led by the word of God, including those who lead us. For no man is fit to lead us who will not speak the word of God to us. That is an important reason why we should remember them.

Moreover, carefully observing the outcome of their conduct, we should imitate the faith, which faith is in Jesus Christ and his good news of our salvation. The conduct of those who lead us (properly), and who spoke the word of God to us, is righteousness. For obedience to the good news of Christ is righteousness. And the outcome or consequences of righteousness includes everything that is good and right and just. We should, therefore, carefully observe the outcome of their conduct, because the outcome of their conduct produces the fruits of righteousness. And observing that encourages us to imitate the faith.

## Various and foreign doctrines

- **Be not carried away by various and foreign doctrines** (Hebrews 13:9).

The author said that Christ is the same yesterday and today, and into the ages. He never changes. And his good news of salvation never changes either. And that is the faith we should imitate, and not be carried away by various and foreign doctrines.

Ambitious and aggressive men have introduced many various and foreign doctrines by claiming that the good news of Christ is a developing and evolving doctrine. Therefore, they call the early church “the primitive church.” That vicious lie justifies to them the changes they try to make in it. The leaders of Catholicism were among the first to claim the authority to make changes in the good news of Christ. They claim apostolic succession with all the authority of the apostles. And before long that church and their practices became unrecognizable from the original and authentic church of Christ.

That was one reason for the Reformation movement that led to the Protestant churches. The restoration movement that came later is the most faithful to what is taught in the Bible. For the members of that movement rely solely upon the authority of the Bible, which is the word of God, for their faith.

The Bible is a visible and permanent testimony that Christ and his good news is the same yesterday and today and into the ages. The Bible is the word of God and never changes, although men continually try to pervert it. They want to pervert it because it contains the genuine will of God for us, which they hate.

## Foods that benefit

- **For it is good the heart be established by grace, not with foods by which those who walked were not benefited. We have an altar from which they have no right to eat, those officiating at the tabernacle** (Hebrews 13:9-10).

It is good for the heart to be established by grace, not with useless foods. The author is using the word foods to symbolize the teachings by which we live our lives. And the various and foreign doctrines, foreign to the good news of Christ, are useless to the heart because those who walk by them are not benefited. Indeed, they lead them astray. Therefore, be not carried away by them.

Paul told how the heart was established by grace, when he said, “**For ye are saved by grace through faith, and this a gift of God, not from you, not from works, so that not any man may boast**” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In this book, Hebrews, the author is teaching how we are saved by Christ. And he often contrasts the new covenant of the good news of Christ for all men with the old covenant of the law of Moses for the Hebrews, which is why this book is called Hebrews. And here the author uses the example of the animal sacrifices as foods that do not benefit those who walk by them.

He contrasts the altar at the tabernacle with the altar we have in heaven. The altar in heaven is mentioned in the following passage from John's great vision of heaven: **"And another agent came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. And much incense was given to him, so that he would give with the prayers of all the sanctified upon the golden altar before the throne"** (Revelation 8:3).

And here is an example of the law of Moses about the priests eating animal sacrifices: **"And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed the sin offering shall be killed before Jehovah. It is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. It shall be eaten in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting"** (Leviticus 6:24-26).

Our being a royal priesthood in the holy nation of the kingdom of God (see First Peter 2:9) means we have our altar in heaven. And the priests of the law of Moses, those who officiated at the tabernacle (and the temple) have no right to eat from it. They have no right unless they forsake that priesthood, and become royal priests in the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

## The blood of atonement

- **For of the beasts whose blood is brought into the holy things for sin by the high priest, the bodies of these are burned outside the camp** (Hebrews 13:11).

The high priest was only allowed in the most holy place on the day of atonement. And when he came in there he was supposed to sprinkle blood of sacrifices on the mercy-seat that is upon the ark of the covenant (the testimony).

Here is part of that ritual: **"And Aaron [the high priest] shall present the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before Jehovah, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before Jehovah, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he not die.**

**"And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat on the east. And he shall sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times before the mercy-seat. Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with his blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat.**

**“And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting that dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses”** (Leviticus 16:11-16).

Here is the law that commanded the animals whose blood was sprinkled to be burned outside the camp: **“And the bullock of the sin offering, and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be carried forth outside the camp, and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung”** (Leviticus 16:27).

## The blood of Christ

- **Therefore Jesus also, so that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate** (Hebrews 13:12).

That ritual of the law of Moses for the day of atonement apparently symbolized the future sacrifice of Christ. The blood that Christ shed made atonement for our sins, just as the blood of the animal sacrifices did for the Hebrew people. However, the sacrifice of Christ was only needed once, not every year. And his sacrifice was for a new covenant with God, which holy place is in heaven itself, not an earthly tabernacle.

Outside the gate in that passage refers to outside of heaven. For it was on the earth that Christ suffered so that he could atone for our sins.

## Joining him outside the camp

- **Let us therefore go forth to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no enduring city, but we seek that which is coming. Through him therefore, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, fruit of lips acknowledging his name** (Hebrews 13:13-15).

Our going forth to him outside the camp symbolizes our rejection of a worldly life for one in heaven. And bearing his reproach refers to the sufferings we endure as we live faithfully to him, even though we are hated and persecuted by the world. Here we have no enduring city. That means this world and our lives in it will pass away. Sinners have no hope of life after this one. However, we who believe in Christ have hope of eternal life, seeking the enduring city that is coming, which is the new Jerusalem in heaven.

A city is a place where a population of people live in close proximity and work together. A city without people is a dead place. It is the people who make it alive and productive. And the city we seek is the enduring city of the new Jerusalem of heaven. That city in the new heavens and the new earth will be populated with all the disciples of Christ. And both God and Christ will dwell there. Therefore, as Peter said, **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13).

Consequently, through him, we must offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually. Our praise to God is a sacrifice because the only way we can praise him is by losing our life

(forsaking worldliness) for the cause of Christ. And that sacrifice of praise must be continually. We must always forsake the sins of the world.

The author said that our sacrifice of praise to God is fruit of lips acknowledging his name. That refers to our confession of faith and allegiance to him. And we do that through his Son Jesus Christ. As faithful disciples of Christ we praise God by living continually in obedience to his Son Jesus Christ.

Our faithful obedience to him is like going forth to him outside the camp, rejecting a worldly life as he did.

## Benevolence and fellowship

- **But do not forget benevolence and fellowship, for God is well pleased with such sacrifices** (Hebrews 13:16).

Benevolence is doing things that benefit others charitably. It is a way of showing love to others who are in need. While Jesus lived upon the earth he was very benevolent. Indeed, he never refused helping someone in need who asked him. He even helped some in need who did not ask him. Most of his miracles were acts of benevolence proving he was from God. Those were given freely, but demands for him to show great theatrical signs and wonders as proof were refused. Therefore, we should not forget benevolence.

Fellowship is the association of friends. It involves companionship and brotherhood. And we should foster fellowship among our spiritual brothers. Remember, Jesus prayed for our unity. And unity is maintained with fellowship. That is an important reason why we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Here is good advice that Solomon gave about fellowship: **“Better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far off”** (Proverbs 27:10). Closer associations are more beneficial. Therefore, we should not forget fellowship among each other.

The author said that God is well pleased with benevolence and fellowship, which he said were sacrifices. Benevolence is a kind of sacrifice because you are giving what you have to someone else, such as money, goods, or labor. Fellowship is a kind of sacrifice because you are giving of your time and friendship to others.

## Have confidence in those who lead you

- **Have confidence in those who lead you, and yield yourselves, for they watch for your souls as men who will render account, so that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this is unprofitable for you** (Hebrews 13:17).

Although there are many men who lead us outside of the church, such as government rulers and job supervisors, the author is referring in the above passage to the church leaders, our congregational elders. They are the men who watch for our souls. They are our spiritual leaders here upon the earth. Therefore, as long as they remain faithful to Christ, we should have confidence in their leadership, and yield ourselves to them and to their decisions. As our leaders, they are responsible for watching our souls, and they will render account to God for that service.

Now that does not mean we should naively trust them, and yield to everything they say and do. That is what the rulers of the Catholic church demand of their members. They discourage them from reading the Bible, claiming their priests are the ones they should trust and obey. However, that is exactly how the Catholic church became so corrupted from the original church of Christ.

Therefore, beware of naively trusting church leaders and yielding yourselves to them. We should never forget, we are the most responsible for watching our own souls. If we follow leaders blindly we risk being condemned with them when they stray from the will of God. It is to the men who lead us faithfully to the will of God that we should have confidence and yield ourselves.

Having confidence in them, and yielding ourselves helps them bear their responsibility with joy. When we show a lack of confidence in them, and fail to yield ourselves, that adds to their burden. It causes them to labor with groaning. And that greatly reduces their ability to watch for our souls.

Consider the example of children who trust their fathers and mothers, and yield themselves to them. Does that not bring joy to their parents? In contrast, children who do not trust them, and continually challenge the decisions they make, that is grievous to their parents. And that is unprofitable for the children because it interferes with the growth of their discipline and learning, as well as the stability of the family.

In the same way, not having confidence in our faithful congregational leaders, and failing to yield ourselves to them, is unprofitable for us. It interferes with maintaining our spiritual health and that of the church. And remember, as with parents and children, there are always going to be problems and challenges that only the elders will be able to manage.

### Pray about us

- **Pray about us, for we trust that we have a good conscience, desiring to behave well in all things. But I urge you to do this even more, so that I may be restored to you sooner** (Hebrews 13:18-19).

Although this book is not addressed to anyone in particular, when the author spoke of being restored to them sooner he was obviously speaking to some people in particular. His use of the plural you instead of the singular thee, indicates he was speaking to more than one individual. That could have meant several men who were somewhere together, or to a particular congregation.

However, nothing in the book identifies who the author was or who he was writing to. He does call them brothers a little farther on. The most we can say is that he was writing to Jewish Christians, because the contents of the book involve so much detail about the law of Moses. Indeed, that is why it is called the book of Hebrews.

The author asked them to pray about him and those with him because he trusted that he and those with him had a good conscience. The author also said they desired to behave well in all things. That is the desire of everyone who has a good conscience. It is a defect of character when a man does not desire to behave well in all things, and it puts his soul at risk. Like a disease to the body, that attitude can eventually destroy the conscience.

God endows each of us innately with a good conscience. However, men can destroy it within themselves. And when that happens it is exceedingly difficult if not impossible to save their souls. Paul spoke of men who have destroyed their consciences, when he said, **“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”** (Titus 1:15), and, **“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).

The author of Hebrews asked the readers to pray about him and those with him even more. And his reason was that he might be restored to them sooner. That indicates more frequent praying has a more profound effect than occasional praying. Examples of that are found throughout the Bible. Remember that when you make your requests to God.

### May Christ make you prepared

- **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 prepared 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).

Our God is the God of peace because there can be no peace when his will is not done. That is the very reason this is such a troubled and evil world. It is full of conflict and strife and sorrows and death because it is filled with sin against God. Genuine peace can only be through obedience to our Creator God.

He is the one who raised Jesus up from the dead. And he is the one who will raise our souls up from the dead if we remain faithful to him. The author said that Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep. We who love truth and righteousness are his sheep. Remember what Jesus said about himself: **“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine, and I am known by mine”** (John 10:14).

The author said that God brought up Jesus from the dead by the blood of an eternal covenant. This is the only place in the Bible that speaks of an eternal covenant. The eternal covenant is no doubt the good news of Christ, which is indeed eternal because it will never pass away. God’s covenant of the law of Moses with the Hebrews has passed away, but the good news of Christ is an eternal covenant.

The good news of Christ was established by his blood. His crucifixion was the climax of his life of perfect obedience to God, which qualified him to redeem us from condemnation so that we could become sons of God for eternity in heaven.

The author called upon God to make the readers (his Christian brothers) prepared in every good work in order to do his will. We must all be carefully prepared for whatever good work we may seek to do. And doing good works is what God desires of us. For it is by our works that we will be judged in that last great day (see Revelation 20:12-13).

Careful preparation is necessary for every successful endeavor. There are many different kinds of good works that can be done. And we must prepare ourselves for those we are

involved with. Everyone knows that the most demanding works require much preparation. But even the most humble work requires some preparation in a man, such as the development of discipline. Therefore, in order to do good works we must be prepared.

Notice how the author said that it is God who does in us what is well-pleasing in his sight. Just as the spirit of the devil works in the sons of disobedience (see Ephesians 2:2), so also the Holy Spirit works in us, the sons of God (see First Corinthians 3:16). Remember what Jesus said about his works: “... **the Father who dwells in me, he does the works**” (John 14:10).

God does in us what is well-pleasing in his sight. His Holy Spirit influences us to do his will through (1) our knowledge of the word of God, and (2) through the feelings of our conscience. That means we must actively obey him before he will work in us what is well-pleasing to him. Our spirit works together with his Spirit in us. And that is how we can do things that are well-pleasing in his sight.

But whatever we do that is well-pleasing to God, it must be through Jesus Christ. For no man who does not believe and obey Jesus the Son of God can be well-pleasing to God. Even men who have never heard of Christ can be well-pleasing to him by their love of truth and righteousness. For remember, Jesus said, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me**” (John 14:6).

Whoever loves truth and righteousness loves Jesus Christ. Moses had never heard of Christ, yet he still loved him by his love of truth and righteousness. Remember these words about Moses: “**Having esteemed the vilification of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he focused toward the recompense of reward**” (Hebrews 11:26).

## Bear with the word of exhortation

- **And I urge you, brothers, bear with the word of exhortation, for I also wrote to you in brief** (Hebrews 13:22).

To exhort is to urge earnestly. And what the author urged them was to believe and obey Jesus Christ. The words of this book are filled with many pleas and many strong reasons to believe and obey Christ. And here, near the end of the book, the author is urging them to bear with the word of exhortation, which is to believe and obey Christ. Scoffers mock at such “preaching,” and they reject it. Be not a fool like them.

The author also said he wrote to them in brief. That suggests he could have written many more things to them. However, like the nutrients from the food that we need for our bodies, so also the knowledge from the word of God that we need for our spirits must be absorbed in portions. It takes time for us to absorb the knowledge offered to us. Therefore, the author judged it best to write to them in brief. Writing to them at length may have overwhelmed them, and consequently would have defeated his efforts.

Whether to speak or write in brief or at length depends upon many things. And the wise man will know which to choose at any particular time and circumstance. And the author of this book was certainly wise, because he was guided by the Holy Spirit of God.

## Regarding brother Timothy

- **Know ye, brother Timothy who was set free is with whom I will see you, if he comes sooner** (Hebrews 13:23).

Timothy was a very faithful helper of the apostle Paul. Indeed, Timothy is mentioned more times in Paul's books than any other man. He is mentioned in ten of the thirteen books that Paul wrote. Nevertheless, Paul worked with other men as well. So the mention of Timothy is not proof that Paul wrote this book.

Nothing is said about where Timothy was, nor what were the circumstance of his bondage. The passage merely says he was set free. The author was hoping that Timothy would come "sooner" so that he could be with him when he came to see those to whom he was writing.

We know so little about who the author of this book was and to whom he was writing. Nevertheless, the early disciples judged this book to be worthy of inclusion in the New Testament. The contents alone are proof enough that its words were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

## Saluting each other

- **Salute all those who lead you, and all the sanctified. The men from Italy salute you** (Hebrews 13:24).

As with many of the other books in the New Testament, the author told us, as disciples of Christ, to salute each other. We are spiritual brothers of each other, and greetings like that help strengthen and maintain our unity. Therefore, do not neglect saluting your fellow Christians. Remember however, to salute simply means to greet. It does not refer to any particular kind of greeting, such as the raised hand used in the military to recognize superior officers.

Notice how the author first said that we should salute those who lead us. Those who lead us bear a great responsibility and often bear heavy burdens as they watch for our souls. Therefore, they especially need to be saluted as a show of our love and support for them. That is, as long as they remain faithful to how Christ wants them to lead us.

Who the men from Italy were is not told. There were no doubt other congregations in Italy as well as the one in Rome. And apparently they were somehow involved in this letter, because they were specifically mentioned as saluting those to whom the book was sent.

## A concluding word of encouragement

- **Grace is with you all. Truly** (Hebrews 13:25).

Those words of encouragement are commonly used in many of the books of the New Testament, although the wording often varies. We all need to remember that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father is always with us, as long as we remain faithful to them. And to that can be said, "Truly."



# A Commentary on The Letter of James

## The man James

- **James, a bondman of God and of Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, greeting** (James 1:1).

There were five different men with the name of James that are mentioned in the Bible, all of which are in the New Testament. Three of those men are mentioned in this passage: **“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). That happened after they had seen Jesus ascend into heaven.

The first James mentioned in that passage was the brother of John. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, as stated in this passage: **“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”** (Matthew 4:21). They were often mentioned together with Peter during the ministry of Christ, and they seemed to have had a special relationship with the Lord. For example, Jesus took those three men with him on the mountain when he was transfigured and spoke to Moses and Elijah (see Luke 9:28-36).

The next man that was mentioned in the passage from Acts is James the son of Alphaeus. He was also chosen by Christ to be one of his apostles. We know little about him. The third man that was mentioned is James the father of Judas (not Judas Iscariot). That Judas was also chosen to be an apostle of Jesus. And we know nothing else about that James.

A fourth man was James the small man, as mentioned in this passage: **“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). We also know nothing more about him.

The fifth James was one of the brothers of Jesus, as mentioned in this passage: **“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?”** (Matthew 13:54-56). Therefore, James the brother of Jude could not have been one of the brothers of Jesus.

James the brother of John was killed by Herod not long after the church was established. This passage tells about it: **“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”** (Acts 12:1-2). James the brother of Jude was probably the apostle James the son of Alphaeus.

The twelve tribes in the Dispersion refer to Hebrews who were living among Gentile nations. The first great dispersion occurred when the Assyrians destroyed the ten northern tribes of Israel about seven hundred years before Christ. The second great dispersion was when the Babylonians destroyed the remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin about a hundred years later. Both of those conquests caused the remnant of the Israelites to be scattered among other nations. The final dispersion was when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God forty years after Christ began his ministry.

James was, therefore, writing to Hebrew Christians who were living in Gentile nations. We know he was writing to Christians because in the next passage he calls them brothers, and mentions their faith.

### Encountering various trials

- **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).

Various trials test our faith. Trials involve hardship and difficulty. And when we experience hardship and difficulty, that tests our faith. And the testing of our faith produces perseverance. Perseverance means continuing in spite of hardship and difficulty. And all who have genuine faith in Christ will learn to continue in spite of opposition and difficulty.

Learning to persevere is an essential part of our salvation, because unless we persevere we will be lost. Moreover, our perseverance makes us perfect and complete, falling short in nothing. That is why our faith is tested with various trials.

Indeed, the testing of our faith is one of the major reasons for our existence in this world. God is choosing those among us who prove themselves worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven. And that is done with testing. Therefore, we who believe in Christ should consider it all joy when we encounter various trials. They test our faith, and the testing of our faith produces perseverance. And the perfection of our perseverance makes us perfect and complete, falling short in nothing.

Paul wrote similarly about perseverance, when he said, **“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. And not only so, but we also take pride in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope”** (Romans 5:1-4).

Therefore dear brother, when you happen to encounter some kind of hardship or difficulty, some kind of ordeal or tribulation remember those words of James and Paul. And be not

disheartened, but consider it an opportunity to perfect your perseverance, which enables you to become perfect and complete, falling short in nothing.

Being perfect and complete, falling short in nothing, refer to the condition of our character. And the perfection of our character gives us the hope of eternal salvation. For remember, Paul said that perseverance produces character, and character produces hope.

Of course, none of us ever become fully perfect as our Savior was. Yet we must persevere in striving to become perfect and complete, abounding in our righteousness. For remember what Jesus said about our righteousness: **“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 5:20).

## Asking God for wisdom

- **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** (James 1:5).

Wisdom is the ability to judge correctly and to know the right ways to act. Wisdom is having both knowledge and understanding. It also includes the ability to successfully apply knowledge. King Solomon is known for his great wisdom. And he wrote much about it in his books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Bible. I made a careful analysis of what he said there, the results of which are in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*.

James said that God would give wisdom to us if we ask him. Many times I have asked God to help give me wisdom to understand some of the things in the scriptures so that I can also help you understand. I ask God to help me, but I also keep thinking and searching to help me understand. God wants to work with us, not entirely for us. Think not that he will give you wisdom in some miraculous way with no effort on your part.

God want us to keep seeking as well as asking. And the best place to seek for wisdom is in his holy book, the Bible. There are many kinds of special wisdom, but the very best and most general kind is what comes from the word of God. Therefore, if you lack wisdom and want it, ask God and also look for what he says in the scriptures. For the wisdom there will help you get any other kind of wisdom.

Notice how James said that God gives generously and not reproaching. To reproach means to accuse and blame. God will not accuse us and blame us for not having wisdom when we ask him for it. Fools are men who do not want wisdom; they refuse it. They are the ones that God reproaches. He reproaches them mainly by the consequences of their own foolish behavior.

God gives to all generously in many ways. His first great show of generosity to us was our very creation. He and he alone (through his Son Jesus Christ) made us and gave us of his own divine spirit so that we are made in his image. And everything in the world was given to mankind by God. It was given to us with a commission to multiply and have power over it (see Genesis 1:28).

God truly gives to all generously. Nevertheless, unrepentant sinners against him will eventually lose everything, including their own souls. All that will remain of them will be their existence in the lake of fire called hell.

## Asking in faith

- **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).

Asking in faith for wisdom means trusting that God will give it. And that means continuing to strive for wisdom with patience and perseverance by continuing to pursue knowledge. A man who doubts will do nothing, because he will lack the conviction needed to persevere in thinking and learning.

The author said that a man who doubts is like a wave of the sea. Waves involve water that rises and falls continuously. That is the kind of mind a man who doubts has. He constantly vacillates between believing God and then doubting him. He cannot make up his mind about God. Like a wave of the sea, his thoughts and beliefs about God are determined by the circumstances around him like the wind on the sea. Favorable conditions will make him believe, but discouraging conditions will take away his faith.

James said that such a man will not receive anything from the Lord. It takes more than mere asking to receive from the Lord. We must ask with conviction. And then work with our unseen God as we strive to acquire the wisdom we seek. Just as the farmer works with his crops in the hope God will give him a good harvest.

A double-minded man is one who is continually changing his mind about things, and that makes him unstable in all his ways. It is one thing to meditate about important decisions, carefully considering your options. But the double-minded man never makes a decision that he retains. It is one thing to make a decision, and then change your mind, but the double-minded man is constantly changing his mind. Double-minded men never succeed at anything. They do not persevere about anything long enough to succeed. Therefore, they do not receive anything from the Lord.

Do not be a double-minded man, but also do not be stubborn and rigid about a bad decision either. At first Paul stubbornly opposed Jesus. Paul kept resisting the subtle ways the Lord was using to convert him. For when the Lord appeared to Paul in his vision on the road to Damascus, he said to him, **“Saul, Saul, why do thou persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads”** (Acts 26:14). Paul was not a double-minded man, because after the Lord appeared to him, Paul spent the rest of his life in zealous service to him. The double-minded man is continually changing his mind, and as a result he never receives anything from the Lord.

## The lowly and the rich

- **Now let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, but the rich in his lowliness, because as a flower of grass he will pass away. For the sun rose up with the burning heat, and withered the grass. And the flower of it fell, and the beauty of its appearance perished. So also the rich man will fade away among his pursuits** (James 1:9-11).

The exaltation of the lowly brother is that he has the hope of eternal salvation and the promise of becoming a son of God for eternity in heaven. The lowliness of the rich is that he will pass away. Men who trust in the glory of their riches instead of God have no hope of salvation. Nor do they have the promise of becoming a son of God in heaven. That puts them in a condition of lowliness, waiting for the loss of everything when their lives here are over.

The sun with its burning heat symbolizes the cumulative effects of life in this world. For just as the grass eventually withers, the flower of it eventually falls, and the beauty of its appearance eventually perishes, so also our flesh eventually withers, the flower of it eventually falls, and the beauty of its appearance eventually perishes.

Rich men rarely believe in Christ and obey him. Remember what Jesus said about the salvation of a rich man: **“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).

Nevertheless, there are a few rich men who do enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Consider the story of Zacchaeus: **“And [Jesus] 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 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).

Zacchaeus was one rich man who did enter the kingdom of the heavens. However, the great majority of rich men never do, because they do not believe and obey Jesus. The great majority of rich men are like the farmer in the parable Jesus told about who trusted in his wealth instead of God:

**“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).

Rich men of all kinds have various things they pursue. Some of them continually seek more riches. Some of them continue to labor at what made them rich. Some of them indulge their pleasures like the rich farmer planned to do. Nevertheless, few of them realize their lowly condition, being separated from God and having no hope after this life is over. The great majority of them are misled by the deceitfulness of their riches, and so they eventually fade away among their pursuits.

## Temptation

- **Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God is without temptation of evils, and he himself tempts no man.**
- **But each man is tempted by his own lust, being drawn away and enticed. Then the lust having conceived, it gives birth to sin, and after being complete the sin brings forth death. Be not led astray, my beloved brothers** (James 1:12-16).

Notice how James says that enduring temptation results in becoming approved. Remember, the major purpose of our lives in this world is to be tested. God tests us in order to see who is worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven. And being subjected to temptation tests our souls.

God tests us but he never tempts us. There is a difference between testing and tempting. Temptation is when sin is encouraged, and God never encourages sin. We are tested when we are subjected to something stressful. We are tempted when we are lured to commit sin. We are tested when we are subjected to temptations. God allows us to be tempted in order to test us.

God even tested his own Son Jesus Christ by exposing him to temptations. Remember this passage: **“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”** (Matthew 4:1). The record tells how the devil tempted Jesus with three different things, but Jesus rebuffed him each time by quoting from the word of God.

Those three temptations were not the only time Jesus was tempted. For the book of Hebrews says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was tempted in all things in the same way we are.

Jesus endured temptation, but he never sinned. He remained perfectly faithful to God. Therefore, he was given the ultimate crown of life. He was seated at the right hand of God, and given authority over all things. And the Lord God has promised that he will give all who love him the crown of life, eternal life, if we resist the temptations of this world and persevere in righteousness.

James says that we are tempted by our own lust. The devil tempts us by trying to arouse our lust. There are right ways and wrong ways for virtually everything, including the satisfaction of our desires. Lust is the desire to indulge wrongfully.

Temptation is when our desire is aroused to indulge ourselves wrongfully. Our lust draws us away and entices us. However, we do not sin unless we succumb to our lust. For, as James said, when lust conceives it gives birth to sin. Our body has many appetites, and sometimes they are aroused to lust. However, we must resist them. Remember how Peter said that our flesh wars against our soul: **“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”** (First Peter 2:11).

Jesus fasted in the wilderness forty days, after which he was hungry. It was then that the devil said to him, **“If thou are the Son of God, speak so that these stones may become bread”** (Matthew 4:3). The devil wanted Jesus to indulge his hunger wrongfully. God did not want Jesus to use his supernatural powers to satisfy his flesh. Therefore, if Jesus had done so he would have sinned.

Notice how James said that after sin is complete it brings forth death. Sin is complete when it becomes habitual. And that means the man becomes a slave to it, because Jesus said, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that every man who does the sin is a bondman of the sin”** (John 8:34). When a man continues in a sin he becomes addicted to it. And that addiction is what brings forth death. I explain that process in much more detail in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

It is possible for a man to overcome an addiction to sin. But that is like overcoming a drug addiction; it will be a struggle. Of course, like everything else such things vary among different persons. Nevertheless, heed the warning of James, and be not led astray. For sin always brings forth death unless it is resisted and rejected.

## Gifts from above

- **Every good gift and every perfect endowment is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning** (James 1:17).

A gift is something that is given by another. An endowment is a kind of enduring gift. Good gifts are those that are beneficial. Perfect endowments are those that are both good and always enduring. Ultimately every good gift and every perfect endowment is from God above. He creates everything that is good. He created the world, and he sustains it by his energy. He is above everything, and every good gift and every perfect endowment comes down from him. I explain how he does those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

This is the only passage in the Bible that uses the phrase **“Father of lights.”** Light symbolizes truth. Therefore, God is always associate with light, while sin is associated with darkness. When the Bible says that God dwells in darkness (see First Kings 8:12), that simply means he is invisible to us, because he himself is light and the father of it.

As the apostle John said, **“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. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from every sin”** (First John 1:5-7).

And 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).

James said that with God there is no change or shadow of turning. There is no change with God because he is perfect in every way. Perfection never changes. Indeed, it cannot

change because that would make it imperfect. Knowing that our God and eternal Father is absolutely perfect is a great comfort to us. His perfection means he never becomes unreliable or incapable. That means we can have absolute confidence in his great promises to us. That means we are guaranteed to become his sons for eternity in heaven—if we continue to remain faithful to his Son Jesus Christ.

And with him there is no shadow of turning because he is light and the Father of lights. Everything else has a shadow of turning because God's light overwhelms every other light. And since light symbolizes truth, we can also say that his truth overwhelms every other truth. For example, although it is true that we will one day die, yet Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age"** (John 8:51).

We who keep his word will not see death because the power of God overwhelms the power of death. Our flesh will die, but our true identity is our eternal spirit, and the spirits of all who keep his word will never see death. Unrepentant sinners will suffer the second death of the lake of fire called hell.

Regarding these words about God, **"... with whom there is no change or shadow of turning,"** they refer to his eternal nature, which never changes. However, while the world exists he has put on the form of a body like ours. That was so we can better identify with him as our heavenly Father made in his image (see Genesis 1:27). Of course, his form is exceedingly more glorious than ours. I also speak more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Nevertheless, after this world ends he will change his form back to what it was before the world was made. For after the final judgment, God said, **"... 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 21:7). He will become as he was originally, because his eternal nature never changes.

## First fruit of his creatures

- **Having deliberated, he begot us by the word of truth for us to be a certain first fruit of his creatures** (James 1:18).

God deliberated by carefully planning before he created the world. Solomon wrote much about that when he spoke of God's master plans that he created before he made anything. Here is how Solomon describes it: **"Jehovah possessed me [wisdom] 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).

I explain how God uses his master plans in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*. In the above passage Solomon personified those plans as a noble woman. However, James called those plans **"the word of truth."** For God brought us into existence by following those master plans. God brought our spirits into existence by begetting us from his own Spirit, but he brought our bodies into existence by creating us from the dust of the earth.

And since the first man Adam was made on the third day of creation before any other living thing, that made us a certain first fruit of his creatures. The following passage tells when Adam was created: **"These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Jehovah God made earth and heaven. And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. And there was not a man to till the ground, but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"** (Genesis 2:4-7).

The day before plants were created was the third day of Creation. And since the fish and birds and beasts of the earth were created after the plants were made, that means our father Adam was the first of God's earthly creatures. Mankind was a *certain* first fruit of his creatures, because God created the heavenly creatures before he created the world. I explain those things much more in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Swiftiness and slowness

- **Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God** (James 1:19-20).

Being swift to hear means being eager and open minded to learn. Of course, we must always be discriminating in what we accept. We should be swift to hear and accept things that are true and right so that we can live more righteously. However, we should also be swift to hear and reject things that are not true and right, because part of our lives involves combating error. And we cannot effectively defend ourselves against error without knowing something about it. One of the sad consequences about living in this sinful world, is that we must spend so much time combating bad things and repairing their effects, instead of creating and building good things.

James said we should also be slow to speak. Solomon warned about speaking much, when he said, **"Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely"** (Proverbs 10:19), and, **"He who spares his words has knowledge, and he who is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is considered wise. When he shuts his lips, he is prudent"** (Proverbs 17:27-28).

Wrath is intense anger. We are not commanded against wrath. However, there are warnings about how to use it. The one above by James is a warning against being hasty in wrath. It is foolish to act impulsively about most anything, but especially about wrath, because wrath can be very destructive, whether it is expressed with words or with actions. Wrath is a powerful emotion in us, and emotions energize us to action. And, like driving a car on a highway with the engine at full power, wrath is very dangerous. Therefore, be slow to wrath.

When James said the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God, he was contrasting God's use of wrath with ours. The Bible often speaks of the wrath of God against sinners. God is all wise, and he knows when and how to use wrath to accomplish something righteous, as well as things destructive to evil. However, the wrath of man rarely if ever accomplishes anything righteous. It may help combat something evil, but it rarely does anything constructive. Perhaps wrath might energize a man to do something beneficial, but that rarely happens because it takes a man with powerful self-control.

## Receive with meekness

- **Therefore having put off all filthiness and profusion of evil, receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21).**

James here speaks about putting off bad things and receiving good things. When he said we must put off all filthiness, he was speaking of moral and spiritual filthiness. Remember what Jesus said about being defiled: **“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 7:20-23).

James also said to put off all profusion of evil. Profusion means abundance. And this world certainly has an abundance of evil. It is profuse with it. And as children of God, we must put off all of it from us. Like keeping our bodies clean, it is a daily struggle to put off all spiritual filthiness and profusion of evil from us.

Notice how James says we must first put off all filthiness and profusion of evil. When Jesus began his ministry the first thing he said to the people was for them to repent. Before we can receive the engrafted word we must put off all filthiness and profusion of evil. We must repent and turn away from all sin. Only then can we receive the engrafted word.

The engrafted word is the good news of Christ. It is engrafted by becoming a part of us, a part of our thinking and our living. For the word of God that can save our souls is not a natural part of us. We are born with a conscience having a basic sense of right and wrong, but without knowledge of the word of God. And with many things we grope in the dark about living right. It is the word of God that gives us light, making things clear to us.

As Jesus said, **“It is written [in the law of Moses], Man will not live on bread alone, but on every word coming out through the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4). The word of God tells us why we exist and how we should live. And it must be engrafted into our hearts and minds by learning and practice. And it must be received with meekness, with a humble heart. For no man who is proud can receive it. Such men only scoff and reject it.

Nevertheless, it has the power to save our souls, 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).

## Become doers of the word

- **But become ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if any man is a hearer of the word and not a doer, this resembles a man observing his natural face in a mirror. For he observes himself, and goes away, and straightaway forgets what kind of man he was. But he who stooped to look into the perfect law, the one of liberty, and who remained, this man, who did not become a forgetful hearer but a doer of work, this man will be blessed in his doing** (James 1:22-25).

That is one more passage showing how the doctrine of salvation by faith only is a false one. A doer of the word is a man who does not just believe, but he also obeys the commands of Christ; he is a doer of work. Men who believe in Christ but ignore his commandments are hearers only, and they deceive themselves. Yet millions of people accept that false doctrine. For example, I continually hear (via closed caption) televangelists urging people to believe Christ, but they say nothing about the necessity of being immersed in water for the remission of their sins to become a disciple of Christ. They deceive many souls. They teach the false and deadly doctrine of salvation-by-faith-only.

James said such people are like men who observe their natural faces in a mirror, but when they go away they immediately forget what kind of men they were. They hear the word of God, but they put it out of their minds. They read the many passages that teach the necessity of immersion for our salvation, but the words have no effect on them. They forget about them and do not obey.

James contrasted such sinful men with those who are not hearers only but are also doers of work. A doer of work is a man

who stooped to look into the perfect law, the one of liberty  
who remained  
did not become a forgetful hearer

Notice how James associated being a doer of the word with being a doer of work. For whoever does the word of God will work to bear fruit for him. For the righteous man, doing is working. Doers also stoop to look into the perfect law. To stoop means to bend down. And that implies humbling yourself to accept and live by what the world rejects and calls foolishness.

Notice also how James calls the perfect law a law of liberty. Legalistic laws are far from perfect, because they are rigid and blind, and do not guarantee justice and righteousness. Sinful men in their cleverness can find ways to pervert and misuse laws of legal systems to defeat justice and righteousness. However, the perfect law of liberty is based upon our love of justice and righteousness. God frees us (all who love truth and righteousness) from legalisms with him, and instead allows us to apply the principles of justice and righteousness to whatever conditions we face. I speak much more about those things in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

And we who are doers of the word and doers of work will be blessing in our doing because God is with us. The Bible is filled with teachings and examples of how we the doers of his word and doers of good work are blessed in our doing. In this evil world, we will suffer persecutions and sorrows from time to time, but God will bless our labors for him and his truth and righteousness.

## Bridling the tongue

- **If any man among you seems to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his heart, this man's religion is futile** (James 1:26).

What James means by being religious is having faith in God. Such faith is a virtue, but a man can make his faith, his religion futile. There are many ways for a man to make his religion futile, one of which is the failure to bridle his tongue.

Remember what Solomon said about bridling the tongue: **“Transgression is not lacking in the multitude of words, but he who refrains his lips does wisely”** (Proverbs 10:19), and, **“The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool will swallow himself up. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is mischievous madness”** (Ecclesiastes 10:12-13).

Any man who claims to believe in God, but does not bridle his tongue, only seems to be religious. Such men are fools, and their religion is futile because their faith in God is useless. It is useless to them and it is useless to others. Indeed, it is worse than useless to others, because such men can cause unbelievers to blaspheme God. As Paul said to the Jews, **“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).

James also said that a man who does not bridle his tongue deceives his heart. Such a man is a fool, and one characteristic of fools is their self-deception. Fools commit folly, and their folly itself deceives them. As Solomon said, **“The wisdom of a prudent man is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit”** (Proverbs 14:8). Notice how men who do not bridle their tongues think of themselves as wise, not realizing what fools they are: **“the folly of fools is deceit.”** Their folly deceives them.

## Pure religion

- **Pure religion and undefiled from God and the Father is this, to go help the orphaned and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world** (James 1:27).

Pure religion is not just having faith in God. It is doing righteousness and avoiding sin. The example of righteousness that James gives is to go help the orphaned and the widows in their affliction. Not all orphans and widows are in affliction. Some orphans are well cared for, and some widows are very secure. It is the ones who are in affliction that we should go help.

Notice how James said to “go help.” Do not wait for those in affliction to come to you and beg. Go to them and help in whatever ways you think are good. We need to go to them

(those we know about) because for various reasons they may not come to us with their needs. Orphans and widows are especially vulnerable to various afflictions. That is an important reason why we should go help them when we can.

Now let no man claim that going to help the orphaned and the widows in their affliction is all there is to pure religion and undefiled from God and the Father. Those things were given as two important examples, just as not bridling the tongue was one important example of making a man's religion futile

## Have no favoritism

- **My brothers, ye should not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, in favoritism. For if a man with a gold ring in bright clothing comes into your synagogue, and also a poor man in dirty clothing comes in, and ye have regard for the man wearing the bright clothing, and say to him, Sit thou here well, and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit here below my footstool, then are ye not partial among yourselves, and become judges from evil thoughts?** (James 2:1-4).

Remember, God is always impartial. He always acts with pure justice. Therefore, we should not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, in favoritism. Of course, that does not mean we should not treat the members of our family better than those of our neighbors. It does not mean we should not treat our fellow Christians better than sinners. Not having favoritism does not mean treating everybody the same way about everything. Not having favoritism means not treating anybody unfairly or undeservedly.

The example James gave is about the treatment of two different men in a synagogue. Remember, the word synagogue literally means a gathering of people. However, it primarily means a gathering of Hebrew people. James gave that in his example because remember this letter is addressed to the Hebrews in the dispersion, those who were Christians. Some of those synagogues located in foreign countries were converted to Christ, but they continued to call them synagogues instead of congregations. We are not commanded to use any particular word for our assemblies together. Hence, congregations of Christian Hebrews could still be called synagogues. However, now days it would not be a good idea because it would be misleading to people.

In the example that James gave, notice how the difference in the two men was only in their physical appearance. That should not determine how we treat them in our congregations. James said that being partial among ourselves that way makes us judges from evil thoughts. Judging the worthiness of a man among us by his wealth is an evil thought.

The amount of wealth a man has should be irrelevant to how we treat our spiritual brothers. And it should also be irrelevant to how we treat visitors in our congregations. For the amount of wealth a man has is unrelated to his spiritual worthiness. Among the good men who sought Jesus, he treated the poor no differently from the rich. He was equally compassionate toward them all.

Jesus did rebuke and condemn the wicked and the hypocrites because they deserved rebuking and condemning. Being impartial does not mean being indiscriminate about

everything. For example, many things we do reveal our attitude. And a man who always comes to the assembly in dirty clothing, even though he is able to come in clean ones, conveys a bad attitude, one of disrespect for the presence of the Lord.

Regarding the statement about sitting below the footstool, that probably means to take a lower position in the assembly. It probably means to sit apart in a more inferior location. I remember being a young freshman at a Christian college in the south that refused to admit Negro students. However, there was one time when Negroes were allowed to come on campus to hear a lecture. Nevertheless, they were still required to sit segregated at the rear in the balcony of the auditorium.

The reason is because at that time racial segregation was not only popular, but it was also the law of the land in the southern states. Consequently, the college required the Negroes to “sit below the footstool” in the auditorium. It was amazingly hypocritical the time I saw it because the featured speaker was himself a Negro. The leaders of that college had indeed become judges from evil thoughts, although I know of some who later repented.

## God chose the poor

- **Listen, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor of the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? But ye have dishonored the poor man (James 2:5-6).**

When James uses the word poor he is not speaking only of those who are destitute. For the word poor is a relative term. As an example of that, Moses first told the people of Israel there would be no poor with them if they obeyed all of Jehovah’s commandments: **“However there shall be no poor with thee (for Jehovah will surely bless thee in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee for an inheritance to possess it), if only thou diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, to observe to do all this commandment which I command thee this day”** (Deuteronomy 15:4-5).

However, a few passages later Moses said the poor would never cease out of the land: **“For the poor will never cease out of the land. Therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shall surely open thy hand to thy brother, to thy needy, and to thy poor, in thy land”** (Deuteronomy 15:11).

In one sense, the poor are those who lack the essentials of life, or only possess the minimum of them. In another sense, they are simply the people with the least possessions in a land. For example, the poor in America are rich compared to the peoples of some countries. Even poor Americans have things like cars and TV sets and telephones. And our socialist rulers have insured that every American can have food to eat, even the most unworthy.

Whether people are in need of the essentials of life, or are in the lower economic levels of society, God so made the world that the humble and lowly would be rich in their faith and love him. The common people of the world are those rich in faith and who love God, and that makes them heirs of the kingdom of God. They are the heirs because God promised his kingdom to those who love him. Remember, God is not partial. He chose the poor of the world because they are rich in faith and they love him. The common people tend to be the most righteous in a land.

Consider the choice Moses made. He rejected the sinful life of the wealthy Egyptians, and became a humble shepherd: **“By faith Moses, having become great, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, having chosen rather to be mistreated with the people of God, than to have the pleasure of sin temporarily. Having esteemed the vilification of the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he focused toward the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not having feared the wrath of the king, for he persevered as seeing the invisible”** (Hebrews 11:24-27). That was one important reason God chose him.

And remember what Paul said about the lowly things of the world: **“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).

Regarding James’ accusation in that passage about dishonoring the poor man, he was referring to those who tell the poor man, **“Stand thou there, or sit here below my footstool.”** James was not accusing everyone in the church of being guilty.

## The rich oppress you

- **Do not the rich exploit you, and they themselves drag you into courts? Do they not blaspheme the good name that was called upon you?** (James 2:6-7).

The word rich is also a relative term. James here uses the word to indicate those who are the most wealthy and powerful in the land. The rich are powerful because wealth and power always go together.

Becoming rich for most men can only be achieved with aggressive and competitive effort. And that usually leads a man to conflicts with his conscience. A man who lives by selfish ambition will harden his conscience so that it will not be an obstacle to him. And those are commonly the kinds of men that become rich.

Remember how Paul warned against wanting to be rich: **“But those who want to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, which sink men in destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of all the evils, of which some aspiring have wandered from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows”** (First Timothy 6:9-10).

Wealth also increases a man’s pride, as Solomon said, **“The rich man is wise in his own conceit, but a poor man who has understanding searches him out”** (Proverbs 28:11). Hence, most rich men believe they deserve their riches because they think they are better than we are.

The rich justify to themselves exploiting us and dragging us into courts. They drag us into courts because they use the legal system to take advantage of us. They exploit us with such things as overcharging what they provide and under paying those who work for them. They exploit by manipulating both people and things to gain advantage. As we live our

lives we can see more examples of it. It is a rare man who reaches old age without seeing someone being exploited in some way by the rich.

The rich and powerful also blaspheme Christ, the good name that was called upon us. They blaspheme him because he condemns their evils. The scholars and the Pharisees were the rich and powerful in Israel during the time of Christ. And remember what he said about them: **“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).

## The royal law

- **If ye indeed fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well. But if ye respect personages, ye work sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors** (James 2:8-9).

This is the only place in the Bible that uses the expression **“royal law.”** Royal primarily refers to aristocracy. However, the word is also used to describe things that are of an elevated status. The law James mentioned is what Jesus called the second great commandment of the law of Moses. That certainly makes it a royal law. It is also commonly called the golden rule (although not in the Bible). And we do well when we obey it.

Personages refer to people of higher status, people like the rich and powerful. Respecting personages is the same thing as being partial, and remember, James condemned partiality. Moreover, Jesus never respected personages. Even his enemies admitted that fact. Remember, what they said to him one time when they were trying to trap him with his words: **“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?”** (Matthew 22:16-17).

Respecting personages is discriminating people unfairly. It is treating some of them unjustly. Respecting personages is not loving thy neighbor as thyself, because none of us like to be treated unjustly. Even criminals complain if they are treated unjustly.

Therefore, respecting personages works sin, and makes a man a transgressor of the law. Remember, James was writing to the Hebrews in the Dispersion. And they were still trying to obey the law of Moses. That seems to be why he condemned respecting personages by showing how it even violated the law of Moses.

## Keeping the whole law

- **For whoever keeps the whole law, and stumbles on one, he has become guilty of all. For he who said thou shall not commit adultery, also said thou shall not murder. Now if thou will not commit adultery, but murder, thou have become a transgressor of law** (James 2:10-11).

A man becomes guilty when he violates the law, even if it is only one violation. Adam became guilty when he violated the one command against eating of the forbidden fruit.

The example James gave was obeying the law against committing adultery but violating the command against murder. Therefore, when a man respects personages he becomes a transgressor of law. And transgressors of law come under condemnation.

The primary lesson James seems to be making here is that we should never make light of any law of God. We should never think all we need to do is be law-abiding citizens to please God. We should never think he will ignore what people think is a minor sin, and still save us without the need to follow Christ. For even the least sin will condemn us. And only Christ has the power to redeem us from that condemnation.

## A law of liberty

- **So speak ye, and so do ye, as men who are to be judged by a law of liberty** (James 2:12).

James is the only writer of the Bible that speaks of the law of liberty, which he earlier called the perfect law. It is only we who are disciples of Christ who will be judged by the law of liberty. Unrepentant sinners will be judged by the laws of right and wrong. Unrepentant sinners have no forgiveness for anything they do.

As Jesus said to the Pharisees, **“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). In heaven a man will pay a penalty for every wrong he did, including every wrong word he spoke in this life, even the idle ones. Sinners have no forgiveness for anything.

However, we as followers of Christ, will be judged by a law of liberty. We are not subject to any kind of legal system with God. He will judge us by how we used our freedom to live right according to his will. And knowledge of his will is be found throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament. As long as we strive to remain faithful to Christ, our punishment for occasional offenses will only be in this life, not in the one to come. For Jesus has redeemed us from eternal condemnation.

## Mercy and judgment

- **For the judgment is merciless to him who did no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment** (James 2:13).

The Bible teaches that on the day of judgment every sin that sinners committed in this life will be judged with absolute justice. That means there will be degrees of punishment, because not all men are equally guilty. I explain that in more detail in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Since James said that judgment is merciless to him who did no mercy, that means he who did mercy will receive mercy. How God will show mercy to the unredeemed sinners of the world is not told. Perhaps he will show mercy by reducing the punishment of those who had shown mercy in this life. That would not only show mercy, but it would also satisfy justice. Punishment would still be given for sins, but those who showed mercy in this life would have their punishment reduced correspondingly. However, as James said, judgment is merciless to him who did no mercy. Men who show no mercy will suffer the full degree of punishment for all of their sins.

When James said mercy triumphs over judgment, he did not mean that mercy defeats judgment. For judgment is the application of justice. And remember what the psalmist said about God and justice: **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne”** (Psalm 97:2). Therefore, mercy does not defeat judgment.

What James means is that mercy can overrule and annul the judgment of condemnation caused by our sins. Nevertheless, that can only happen if such mercy satisfies justice, because justice must always be upheld. And since Jesus alone was able to triumph over judgment with his mercy while still fulfilling justice, that makes him alone our Savior. He was able to do it because he earned the right from God to redeem us. The right to redeem all who belong to him was partial payment to Jesus for his life of perfect obedience here in this evil world. Therefore, mercy triumphs over judgment only through Jesus Christ.

Only we who believe and obey the commandments of Christ will escape the judgment of condemnation for our sins. Justice demands that every man who sins suffer the judgment of punishment in the afterlife. However, for all who belong to Christ, his mercy triumphs over that judgment. We will not suffer punishment for the sins we committed, because Christ redeemed us from it. He paid our debts to God, and made us righteous and holy before him.

### Faith without works is dead

- **What is the benefit, my brothers, if some man should say to have faith, but has no works? Can the faith save him? And if a brother or sister may be unclothed, and may be destitute of daily food, and some man of you would say to them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and fed, but ye would not give them the things necessary for the body, what is the benefit? So also faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself** (James 2:14-17).

Those who promote the doctrine of salvation-by-faith-only have been troubled by this part of what James wrote. However, instead of giving up their false doctrine, they claim the passage does not mean what it says. For example, they say that James is speaking about a false faith or a pretended faith.

They say we cannot interpret what James said here literally, because that would contradict what Paul taught. For example, Paul said, **“We therefore consider a man to be made righteous by faith independent of works of law”** (Romans 3:28), and, **“We are Jews by nature and not sinful men of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not made righteous from works of law, instead through faith of Jesus Christ. And we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made righteous from faith of Christ, and not from works of law, because no flesh will be made righteous from works of law”** (Galatians 2:15-16).

However, Paul was not diminishing the necessity of works. For he also said, **“Do we then make law void through faith? May it not happen! Instead, we establish law”** (Romans 3:31). Paul was simply saying that salvation cannot be earned. It cannot be earned because the cost is too great. Only Jesus was able to pay it for us. Paul was not dismissing the necessity of having good works. For salvation is impossible without having good works. What James says is literally true: faith without works is dead.

Remember what Jesus said to the Jews: **“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). Faith without (good) works is dead.

We cannot be saved by works of law because salvation is impossible for us to earn. Our salvation can only come as a gift of God’s grace because of our faith and obedience to his Son Jesus Christ. Our salvation is a result of our faith and our obedience to his commandments. For 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”** (First John 2:3-4).

As John said, genuine faith is when we obey his commandments. And his commandments say that we should do things like clothe and feed our brothers and sisters who are in need. Doing such good works is proof that we have a living faith. Without good works our faith is dead.

Let no man deceive you. Although good works alone will not save us, neither will faith alone save us. For **“faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.”**

## Showing your faith

- **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).

Continuing with his argument against faith alone, James shows how works demonstrates a man’s faith. It is easy to show your faith with good works, but it is impossible to show your faith without them. Words are easily spoken and can be deceitful. However, works, continuous good works, do not lie. For no man is going to endure the hardships of doing good works for Christ who does not believe in him. Therefore dear brother, do not neglect doing good works for our Lord.

## The demons also believe

- **Thou believe that there is one God, thou do well. The demons also believe, and shudder** (James 2:19).

James here shows the difference between simple belief, which is a dead faith without works, and a living faith that produces good works. He even indicates that faith without works is no better than the belief of demons. They believe there is one God, but they hate him and reject his Son Jesus Christ. Remember what some of them said to Jesus when they recognized him: **“What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God?”** (Matthew 8:29). Demons believe in Jesus the Christ, but they want nothing to do with him.

The demons were afraid of the Lord, but not enough to be righteous. They believe and shudder because they know God has the power to punish them. For they also said to Jesus, **“Did thou come here before the time to torment us?”** (Matthew 8:29). What they meant

by the time was no doubt the end of the world. They must have been told that was when they would be cast into hell with the devil. Yet, like the devil himself, their lack of faith in God keeps them from repenting. They believe there is one God, but they have no faith or love for him.

## The works of Abraham

- **But do thou want to know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is dead? Was not Abraham our father made righteous from works, having offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou see that faith was working with his works, and from the works, faith was fully perfected.**
- **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. Ye see therefore that from works a man is made righteous, and not from faith only (James 2:20-24).**

As further evidence of the necessity of both faith and works, James used the example of Abraham. Paul also used the example of Abraham, but Paul used him to show how we are made righteous through faith and not by works of law. Here is what he said: **“We therefore consider a man to be made righteous by faith independent of works of law. 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. Do we then make law void through faith? May it not happen! Instead, we establish law.**

**“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 3:28-4:3).**

James said that **“from works a man is made righteous, and not from faith only.”** While Paul said he considered **“a man to be made righteous by faith independent of works of law.”** Were Paul and James contradicting each other? Not at all, because remember Paul qualified his words, by saying, **“Do we then make law void through faith? May it not happen! Instead, we establish law.”**

When Paul said that our faith establishes law, he meant our faith results in our obedience to God’s commandments. Our faith makes us obedient to God, and that makes us righteous before him. Hence, Paul agrees with James, who said that **“from works a man is made righteous, and not from faith only.”**

When Paul said he considered **“a man to be made righteous by faith independent of works of law,”** he was simply saying that faith is what saves us and not good works alone. He was not saying that faith alone is what saves us. The faith Paul spoke about is a faith that establishes law, meaning obedience to God’s commandments and doing good works. The faith that makes us righteous is the faith that James said was fully perfected. A fully perfected faith is one that is working together with works, a living faith that is complete.

Here is the Old Testament scripture that James quoted about Abraham's belief being reckoned to him for righteousness: **"And he [Jehovah] brought him [Abraham] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said to him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah, and he reckoned it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:5-6).

Abraham's works fulfilled his faith, making it complete and fully perfected. If Abraham had no good works, his faith would have been a dead one, and he would not have been righteous. Abraham's works of obedience were what fulfilled his faith in God. It made it a living faith, and that is what made him righteous before God. Hence, **"... from works a man is made righteous, and not from faith only."**

Regarding Abraham being a friend of God, there are two scriptures in the Old Testament that tell us about that. King Jehoshaphat mentioned that in a prayer he spoke before the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem: **"Did thou not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and give it to the seed of Abraham thy friend forever?"** (Second Chronicles 20:7). And Jehovah said it himself as recorded in the book of Isaiah: **"But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend ..."** (Isaiah 41:8).

Abraham was a friend of God because he not only believed in him, but he proved it by his works of obedience. Jehovah later told of Abraham's obedience when he gave the blessing of Abraham to his son Isaac: **"And I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give to thy seed all these lands, and in thy seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my order, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws"** (Genesis 26:4-5).

## The works of Rahab

- **And likewise also was not Rahab the harlot made righteous from works, having received the agents, and having sent them out another way?** (James 2:25).

Remember, the author of the book of Hebrews spoke of the faith of Rahab, when he said, **"By faith Rahab the harlot was not destroyed with those who were disobedient, having received the spies with peace"** (Hebrews 11:31). Her faith in God saved her from being destroyed with the other people of Jericho. However, James said that the works of Rahab were what made her righteous **"having received the agents, and having sent them out another way."**

The author of Hebrews said that Rahab was saved from the destruction of Jericho by her faith, while James said she was saved because of her works. Were the two authors contradicting each other? Not at all, because remember, James said, **"Ye see therefore that from works a man is made righteous, and not from faith only"** (James 2:24). Rahab would not have been saved, neither would she have been made righteous by her faith only.

The people of Jericho believed in Jehovah, because Rahab said to the agents of Israel, **"I know that Jehovah has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us. And that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when ye came out of**

**Egypt, and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man because of you, for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath”** (Joshua 2:9-11).

The people of Jericho believed in Jehovah the same way the demons do. They believed he exists and has the power to save or destroy. However, they refuse to repent and do good works. Had they repented, I have no doubt God would have spared them the way he spared the people of Nineveh from destruction. Below is that story:

**“So Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Jehovah. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey. And he cried out, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.**

**“And the people of Nineveh believed God, and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the news reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.**

**“And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed, nor drink water, but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily to God. Yea, let them turn each one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we not perish?**

**“And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God relented of the evil which he said he would do to them, and he did not do it”** (Jonah 3:3-10).

It is from works that we are made righteous and not from faith only.

## Faith without works is dead

**For as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without the works is dead** (James 2:26).

Every man has an eternal spirit within his body of flesh, flesh that is made of the dust of the earth. And as Solomon said about those two, spirit and flesh, **“... the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”** (Ecclesiastes 12:7). When our eternal spirit departs from our body, our body dies. James used that as an example of faith without works. It is dead like a body is dead without its spirit. I explain much more about the nature of spirits and life in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## The greater judgment of teachers

- **Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If any man**

**does not stumble in word, this is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body** (James 3:1-2).

We all teach each other different things at various times, but we are not all teachers. A teacher is someone who devotes himself to teaching, whether vocally or with writings. James included himself as a teacher when he said they would receive greater judgment. James is probably using the word judgment here in the sense of receiving criticism and censure. Greater judgment would be more severe criticism and censure from other men.

James could not have been speaking of judgment in heaven. Otherwise, teachers would have a greater risk of criticism in heaven. And unless there were greater rewards in heaven for being a teacher, the greater risk of criticism would discourage men from wanting to become teachers. And I do not see how there could be greater rewards in heaven for being a teacher, because there are many men who do not have the talents or the opportunities to be teachers. Thus, James was speaking of receiving greater judgment in this life.

James' command against many becoming teachers was probably given to discourage poorly qualified men. As James said, we all stumble in many things. That means even the best of us make many mistakes, including teachers. And teachers who teach something wrong are going to be criticized and censured more severely than most other people who make mistakes. Therefore, only the most qualified men should become teachers.

James also said that all of us stumble in word, because there is no perfect man, except for Jesus Christ the Son of God. He was perfect in the sight of God in every way. He never spoke anything wrongfully, even though the Jews tried desperately to trap him in his words.

Remember this passage: **“Then the Pharisees having departed, they took counsel how they might trap him in his talk”** (Matthew 22:15). After the Pharisees failed, the Sadducees tried, but they also failed. After that the Pharisees tried one more time without success. Then the record says they quit trying: **“And no man was able to answer him a word, nor did any man from that day dare to question him any more”** (Matthew 22:46). They quit trying because they were publicly embarrassed by their failures with him.

Moreover, Jesus was able to bridle his whole body. An example of that was the time of his betrayal and crucifixion. He prayed privately to God three times to escape that ordeal. Luke describes how much agony he suffered knowing what he would experience: **“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).

Nevertheless, Jesus endured it all because he wanted to obey his God and Father, and he was able to bridle his own body. The rest of us stumble in many things, especially in the things we say. Therefore, not many of us should become teachers.

## The power of the tongue

- **Behold we put bits into the mouths of horses for them to obey us, and we guide about their whole body. Behold also the ships, being so great and driven by fierce winds, are guided about by a very small rudder, wherever**

**the impulse of the man who steers determines. So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly** (James 3:3-5).

James here begins to speak about the power of words. Horses are large and powerful animals. Yet with a small bit they can be completely controlled. Ships are even larger and more powerful than horses. Yet regardless of how large and powerful ships are, they can be guided about by a relatively small rudder.

James used those two examples to show how the little tongue in our mouths with its words can have great power over us. 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). The tongue is the organ of speech. Speech is the main medium of our language, and language is what controls people who are not completely lawless.

James said the little tongue boasts greatly. That means men who have become skilled with their speech often become proud of the power it gives them. Great speakers usually become powerful leaders. And power tends to puff a man up and cause him to think too much of himself. His skillful tongue causes him to boast greatly, both to himself or to others. And that leads to trouble, as James describes next.

## The tongue is a fire

- **Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. 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 3:5-6).

The power of the tongue can be used for good or for evil. Solomon told of its good, when he said, **“The mouth of a righteous man is a fountain of life ...”** (Proverbs 10:11), and, **“The tongue of a righteous man is choice silver”** (Proverbs 10:20). In other passages Solomon told of its evil.: **“A worthless man devises mischief, and in his lips there is as a scorching fire. A perverse man scatters abroad strife, and a whisperer separates chief friends. A man of violence entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good. He who shuts his eyes devises perverse things. He who moves his lips brings evil to pass”** (Proverbs 16:27-30).

In this part of his book James also tells of the evil the tongue can create. Like Solomon, he compared it with fire. Unrestrained fire is one of the most destructive forces upon the earth. And the unrestrained tongue is like a fire. As a tiny match stick can cause a huge forest fire, so the tongue can cause riots and wars. Explosives are a kind of fire that occurs exceedingly fast.

Unrighteousness is sin against God, and sin by its nature is always destructive. Therefore, like a fire, the tongue is part of the world of unrighteousness, and that defiles us. Remember when Jesus told how the tongue defiles us: **“Not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles the man. ... 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 15:11-20).

What James means by the cycle of nature is the activities of life. And the tongue sets the activities of life on fire. The tongue has been responsible for very destructive wars. The tongue of Adolph Hitler kindled a war that literally set his country Germany and many other parts of Europe on fire. The cycle of nature (the activities of life) in Germany became a raging fire.

The cycle of nature was set on fire by the tongue, which was itself set on fire by hell. Hell in this sense refers to the world of the devil and the demons, and every other sinner. And it was the spirit of the devil that provoked Adolph Hitler to kindle that great war. Hitler was an arrogant atheist who believed in evolution. Therefore, the devil could easily set a fire in Hitler’s heart to use his tongue to kindle a kind of hell in Germany and other parts of Europe.

## The untamed tongue

- **For every species, both of beasts and of birds, both of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human species. But no man is able to tame the tongue of men, an unruly evil, full of deadly poison** (James 3:7-8).

James is not speaking literally about every species having been tamed by mankind. He is speaking about how mankind has gained control of the animals of the earth. However, the tongue cannot be tamed or controlled. Deceit, which is a product of the tongue, is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. And there is no other sin that is more prevalent than deceit. Mankind has never been able to control the unruliness of the tongue, nor eliminate its deadly poisons such as deceit.

## Using the tongue for right and for wrong

- **By it we bless the God and Father, and by it we curse men, who were made according to a likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and curse. My brothers, these things ought not to happen this way. Does the spring pour out from the same opening the sweet and the bitter? A fig tree, my brothers, cannot make olives, or a grapevine figs. In the same way, no one spring makes water salty and sweet** (James 3:9-12).

When James uses the word “we” he is speaking in the generic sense of mankind in general, because I am confident James was not including every man. Moreover, he was speaking of the thoughtless curses and profanities that men commonly utter against each other. He was not condemning every kind of curse.

For example, Jesus occasionally cursed some men, as shown in this passage: **“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”** (Matthew 11:21). Jesus cursed those people because they deserved it.

A man who blesses God, but also utters thoughtless curses and profanities against other men is perverse. A filthy mouth utters thoughtless curses and profanities against other men. How then can a man with a filthy mouth bless the God and Father? As James says, **“Does the spring pour out from the same opening the sweet and the bitter?”**

Such a combination of utterances ought not happen that way. Such things are impossible in nature. As James says, a fig tree cannot make olives, or a grapevine figs. Nor does one spring make water both salty and sweet. Trying to bless the God and Father, and also uttering thoughtless curses and profanities against other men is unnatural and perverse.

Men should not utter thoughtless curses and profanities against each other at all. As James reminds us, we are all made according to a likeness of God. Therefore, we ought to love our neighbors as ourselves, and not speak that way against them. Cursing should be reserved for only the most wicked of sinners who deserve it. As the prophet Isaiah said, **“Woe to the wicked! It is ill with him, for what his hands have done shall be done to him”** (Isaiah 3:11).

## Who is wise among you?

- **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show from his good behavior his works in meekness of wisdom** (James 3:13).

Men who are genuinely wise and understanding among us are not boasters. They show their works from their good behavior. Men who are wise and understanding among us show their wisdom with their behavior, because their behavior produces good works. Their works prove their wisdom and understanding.

Remember what Jesus said about wisdom: **“And wisdom is justified from all her children”** (Luke 7:35). By all her children Jesus meant all the results of the offspring of wisdom, all of the results and consequences of wisdom. Those are the things that justify wisdom, and prove that it is authentic. And good works are always a result of applying wisdom with good behavior. Wisdom properly applied produces good behavior, and good behavior produces good works.

Moreover a wise and understanding man will show his works in meekness of wisdom. For every genuinely wise and understanding man is meek and humble, realizing how great and complex the world is, and how little of it he knows. For example, the great scientist Isaac Newton said of his discoveries, “I was like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

## Bitter envy and selfish ambition

- **But if ye have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast, and do not lie against the truth** (James 3:14).

Envy is the desire to have something someone else possesses. It is a vice. Bitter envy is the desire to have something someone else possesses with an attitude of anger and resentment against them for having it. Bitterness compounds the evil of envy.

Jealousy is not envy, because jealousy is about things that a man already has. Jealousy is a virtue, because God said of himself, “... **I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God** ...” (Deuteronomy 5:9). He is jealous for us because we are his children. Of course, like many other things jealousy can become a vice.

Ambition is a strong desire to achieve and succeed. Ambition for things that are good and right and just is a virtue. But selfish ambition is a vice. Selfish ambition is a strong desire to achieve and succeed at promoting yourself. Bitter envy and selfish ambition often go together. Bitter envy can motivate a man to have selfish ambition, and selfish ambition can arouse bitter envy. They feed upon each other.

Selfish ambition in a man promotes arrogant boasting, because his successes puff him up. They puff him up because his goals are perverted. Instead of wanting to achieve and succeed in doing good things for the Lord, the man with selfish ambition wants to achieve and succeed in doing good things for himself. Consequently, success causes him to boast with arrogance.

James also said that having bitter envy and selfish ambition is a lie against the truth. It is a lie because bitter envy and selfish ambition violate truth. The word truth in the Bible often refers to all the ways of God and his righteousness. That is why Jesus said about himself, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life**” (John 14:6). Bitter envy and selfish ambition violate the ways of God and his righteousness. Hence, having bitter envy and selfish ambition is a lie against the truth.

## Earthly wisdom

- **This wisdom is not descending from above, but is earthly, world-soul, demonic. For where envy and selfish ambition are, there is instability and every evil deed** (James 3:15-16).

Wisdom can be either good or it can be evil. Evil wisdom, that which is not descending from above, includes bitter envy and selfish ambition. (James describes the good wisdom that comes from above in the next passage.)

Evil wisdom is earthly, world-soul, and demonic. Evil wisdom being earthly means it is corrupting, because this is a corrupting world. The word world-soul means natural to this world. And that also characterizes evil wisdom, because this world is filled with sin and wickedness. Evil wisdom is also demonic or devilish, because it is used to create unrighteousness.

Words that are commonly used to describe evil wisdom are, shrewd, sly, cunning, and wily. It is also called crafty and artful. All those words are used to describe evil wisdom because it uses skill with deception to create unrighteousness.

Evil wisdom is what contrasts wicked men with fools. Wicked men use the knowledge and understanding they acquire to create unrighteousness. They corrupt and misapply their

wisdom. In contrast, fools have no wisdom at all because they hate knowledge and reject it. Fools live only by their fleshly lusts and impulses.

Beware of envy and selfish ambition, because, as James said, where they are, there is instability and every evil deed. Beware of having envy and selfish ambition yourself, and beware when you see envy and selfish ambition in others. For nothing good comes of envy and selfish ambition. As James said, they create instability and every evil deed.

Instability is an enemy of peace and order. Instability is destructive and harmful. Earthquakes and storms create instability in the things of nature. Envy and selfish ambition create instability in the affairs of men. They provoke fightings and wars. They are like the tongue in being a consuming fire.

Fight against any urge to be envious, or to have selfish ambition. With them you may succeed in achieving some things, but you will leave behind a trail of misery and destruction. And you will destroy your soul. He who has open eyes can see many examples of that as we live our lives in this sinful world.

## The wisdom from above

- **But the wisdom from above is indeed first pure, then peaceful, gentle, easily entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and non-hypocritical** (James 3:17).

James said the good wisdom was descending from above. There is too much that can be said about that here. In order to learn more about the rich meaning of the good wisdom, read what I have written about it in my book *King Solomon's Advice for the World*. I explain there how the good wisdom we have is from what I call the "master blueprints" that God used to create the world. In my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity* I also explain how God continues to use that wisdom, those "master blueprints," to manage the world.

In contrast to the evil wisdom of this world, the wisdom from above is

pure  
 peaceful  
 gentle  
 easily entreated  
 full of mercy  
 full of good works  
 impartial  
 non-hypocritical

James said the wisdom from above is first pure. Being first pure probably means that purity is the primary characteristic of the wisdom from above. And that means when the wisdom from above is applied it always creates righteousness. But remember, part of righteousness is combating evil.

The wisdom from above is also peaceful. That means it promotes peace. It unites people together and prevents conflicts and strife. The first Christians were guided by the wisdom from above, and they were a united people, bearing much fruit of righteousness for the

cause of Christ. As children of God our goal is peace. We war a spiritual war against sin because only obedience to God can bring peace.

James said the wisdom from above was also gentle. That does not mean it is weak and cowardly. On the contrary, the wisdom from above is strong and courageous. However, it is also gentle. That means it is not rough and harsh. A mother is gentle toward her children so that she can encourage them to grow and develop into productive adults. The wisdom from above also gently encourages us to grow and develop into productive people.

Entreating the wisdom from above means to earnestly seek for it. And James said it is easily entreated. If a man truly wants to know the wisdom from above—what is good and right and just, and how to achieve it—then he will learn. What has made science so successful is the earnest quest for the genuine truths of nature. And when men earnestly seek the wisdom from above, they will find it.

Nevertheless remember, we must seek diligently with much labor. The wisdom from above is easily entreated, but not without our effort. Easily in this case means definitely attainable, not effortless. And finding the deepest mysteries of it will require greater efforts.

The wisdom from above is also full of mercy. That means finding it enables us to escape and avoid troubles. It also shows the way to healing and recovery.

The wisdom from above is also full of good works. It becomes full of good works when it is applied properly. For it is our knowledge and understanding that enable us to achieve good works. Indeed, every good work we do is a result of the wisdom from above.

The wisdom from above is also impartial. It is no respecter of persons. Every man who has the talents and the opportunities can gain from that wisdom, regardless of who he is. The Bible is the greatest source of the wisdom from above, and any man who can read and has access to a copy can learn from it.

The wisdom from above is also non-hypocritical. Hypocrisy in a man is pretending to be what he is not. The wisdom from above never pretends to be what it is not. It is not deceitful. What it says is what it is. Of course, that does not mean it has no mysteries, riddles, paradoxes, symbolisms, or other kinds of more challenging aspects of it.

## Righteousness and peace

- **And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace to those who make peace** (James 3:18).

Applying the wisdom from above produces righteousness. And the fruit of righteousness consists of blessings and benefits. And when those blessings and benefits are sown they multiply and spread. And since one of those blessings is peace, then peace also enables blessings and benefits to multiply and spread. Hence, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace. And that happens by those who make peace.

Peace enables blessings and benefits to multiply and spread, because peace is the absence of strife and war. Wars and fightings are always destructive. They diminish and shrink blessings and benefits. Warriors may gain some things by plunder, but plunder does not create anything. Plunder is just taking away the blessings and benefits from others.

Nevertheless, Solomon said there was **“a time for war, and a time for peace”** (Ecclesiastes 3:8). And Jesus said, **“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).

The proper time for war is to combat sin and wickedness. For unless sin and wickedness are opposed they will spread like pestilence in a field of grain.

## The cause of wars and fightings

- **From where are wars and fightings among you? Is it not from here: from your pleasures warring in your body-parts? Ye desire and do not have, so ye murder. And ye envy and cannot obtain, so ye fight and make war** (James 4:1-2).

Remember what Paul said about our body-parts: **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that what ye may want, these things ye should not do”** (Galatians 5:17). And 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).

As long as men live only for their earthly pleasures there will be wars and fightings among them. Cain was the first murderer. He killed his brother Abel because he wanted God’s approval as his brother did, but he did not get it. He envied his brother and did not obtain the Lord’s approval. He did not obtain God’s approval because he did not do what God wanted of him. So instead of obeying God, Cain chose to murder his brother.

Thus it has been throughout history. Men desire and do not have, so they murder. They envy and cannot obtain, so they fight and make war. And, as James says in the next passage, they do not have because they want to use their blessings and benefits wrongfully.

## Asking and not receiving

- **Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures** (James 4:2-3).

James said that men do not receive God’s blessings and benefits because they do not ask. And asking is more than just using words. Asking includes working to obtain. There are a few things that God gives freely without our labors, such as sunshine, rain, and air.

However, God will withhold even things like the rain we need when men become too sinful. For example, Moses said to the sons of Israel, **“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them, and the anger of Jehovah be kindled against you, and he shut up the heavens, so that there shall be no rain, and the land shall not yield its fruit, and ye perish quickly from off the good land which Jehovah gives you”** (Deuteronomy 11:16-17).

James also said that even asking is not enough. We must ask rightly, to use his blessings and benefits to promote things that are productive and useful. Asking wrongfully is wanting to squander the blessings and benefits on pleasures.

Since most Americans decided to forsake God and become pagan, there has been a great increase in what is spent on useless pleasures. God does not condemn all pleasure. There is a time and a place for some pleasures. For example, Solomon also said there was **“a time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance ...”** (Ecclesiastes 3:4). There is a time to laugh and dance. Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son tells how there was rejoicing and dancing when the prodigal son returned to his father (see Luke 15:25).

However, overindulging pleasures is what God condemns. For example, God wants us to enjoy the food we eat, but gluttony is a sin. And wanting to use our blessings and benefits to indulge our pleasures is sin. Consequently, God withholds them. And pagan America is a good example of how the growing lust for pleasures has weakened the growth of our prosperity.

## The friendship of the world

- **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).

James addressed this book to his fellow Jews in the Dispersion. He also referred to the readers as “my brothers.” However, apparently when James rebuked the readers as being adulterers and adulteresses, he was referring to the Jews who had not accepted Christ.

There were times when Jehovah accused his people of committing adultery against him, as in this passage: **“And I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorcement, yet treacherous Judah her sister feared not, but she also went and played the harlot. And it came to pass through the frivolity of her whoredom, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks”** (Jeremiah 3:8-9). The people committed adultery against God by worshiping idols of stone and wood (and sometimes of metal).

We commit adultery against God when we join the world in their sinfulness. As James said, **“friendship of the world is hatred of God.”** The world hates God. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“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). Therefore, being friends of the world is to join them in hating God.

Of course, we must live in the world, interact with it, and work with it in material things. However, we cannot have friendship with the world, because a friend is a supporter and a sympathizer. And the world is against God. How can we support and sympathize with the world when it hates God and is against him? As faithful Christians we cannot, because he who **“wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”**

The world becomes our enemy when we turn to God. Peter spoke of that, when he 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”** (First Peter 4:3-4).

## The jealousy of the Spirit

- **Or think ye that the scripture says vainly, The Spirit that he caused to dwell in us yearns with jealousy?** (James 4:5).

There is no particular passage in the Bible that says, **“The Spirit that he caused to dwell in us yearns with jealousy.”** As others have suggested, James was probably referring to the various times the Bible speaks of the jealousy of God.

For example, in his command against making graven images, Jehovah said, **“Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God ...”** (Exodus 20:5). And Nahum the prophet said, **“Jehovah is a jealous God and avenges. Jehovah avenges and is full of wrath. Jehovah takes vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies”** (Nahum 1:2).

As James said, the Bible is not speaking vainly about God’s jealousy for us. Remember, God placed his Holy Spirit in us when we were begotten from water and Spirit to become a disciple of Christ. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). And Paul said to the disciples at Corinth, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16).

Therefore, God will take vengeance against those who would turn us against him. Moreover, he will rebuke and chasten us when we try to turn from him. He will chasten us, yearning with jealousy, as long as there is hope. Nevertheless, he will eventually reject those who are adamant about turning away from him, just as he did to his people Israel.

## He gives greater grace

- **But he gives greater grace. Therefore it says, God is opposed to the arrogant, but gives grace to the lowly** (James 4:6).

God blesses all men, but he gives greater grace to the lowly. Jesus gave an example of how God blesses all men, when he said that God **“makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”** (Matthew 5:45). However, God gives greater grace to the lowly, because Jesus said they will inherit both heaven and earth: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. ... Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:3, 5).

The Bible is filled with lessons about how God is against the arrogant but is for the humble and lowly. For example, Solomon wrote many proverbs about pride and humility. Here is one of them: **“Pride is before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18). Here is one of his proverbs about how God is opposed to arrogant men: **“Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Jehovah. Hand in hand, he**

**shall not be unpunished**” (Proverbs 16:5). You can read more about what Solomon said about pride and humility in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

The passage James quoted is also from the book of Proverbs: **“Surely the Lord is opposed to the arrogant, but he gives grace to the lowly”** (Proverbs 3:34). Those words are from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. I included them in my translation (the ACV) instead of the Hebrew from the Masoretic version because that is what James quoted. And I always give precedence to what the divinely inspired authors of the New Testament wrote about things in the Old Testament.

## Be subordinate to God

- **Be subordinate therefore to God, but resist the devil and he will flee from you. Approach God and he will approach you** (James 4:7-8).

In that passage James gives simple advice about both approaching God and resisting the devil. In order to properly and acceptably approach God we must subordinate ourselves to him. And subordinating ourselves includes being humble, and obeying all of his commands. Arrogant men can never approach God because he is opposed to them.

Indeed, arrogant men will never even see God, because Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God”** (Matthew 5:8). Only the pure in heart will see God. And when John was describing the new Jerusalem in heaven, he said, **“And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him. And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads”** (Revelation 22:3-4). Only those who belong to Christ will see God’s face.

I have seen many examples of how resisting the devil will cause him to flee from you. But that resistance must be with conviction and firmness. As with each of us, I have been tempted by the devil’s disciples many times. And every time I firmly resisted, they turned and walked away.

Remember the record of how the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus firmly resisted each of the three temptations by quoting a scripture. And after the third temptation the devil left him. People are captured by the devil because they do not resist him.

When the devil tempts you, remember this scripture: **“No temptation has taken you except is common to man. But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what ye are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, to enable you to endure”** (First Corinthians 10:13).

## Cleanse the hands and purify the hearts

- **Cleanse the hands, ye sinners, and purify the hearts, ye double-minded** (James 4:8).

James said that sinners should cleanse their hands. Cleansing the hands means to stop sinning. He also told the double-minded to purify their hearts. James said earlier that a dou-

ble-minded man was **“unstable in all his ways”** (James 1:8). Such a man is continually changing his mind about things, and that is what makes him unstable.

The kind of double-minded man James seems to be referring to here is a man who harbors evil thoughts in his mind with the good ones. Hence, he vacillates his behavior, sometimes doing righteous things, but other times doing sinful things. King Saul of Israel was a double-minded man. You can read about him in the book of First Samuel. A double-minded man is similar to a hypocrite. The difference is that a hypocrite pretends to be what he is not, while a double-minded man is not consistent in how he lives and he does not try to hide it.

Both hypocrites and double-minded men deserve being condemned. Both of them need to repent and purify their hearts. And purifying the hearts means to resist and drive out the evil thoughts and desires in their minds.

Nevertheless, in this sin filled world keeping our hands clean and our hearts pure is a continuing struggle for all of us. For we live in a corrupted body of flesh that wars against our soul. Remember what 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).

## Let sinners mourn

- **Be ye sorrowful, and mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into a downcast look. Be ye made lower in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up** (James 4:8-10).

Genuine repentance includes not only turning away from sin but having feelings of remorse. In the above passage James emphasizes the need for serious remorse. And he told of five ways to express it:

be sorrowful  
mourn  
weep  
turn your laughter into mourning  
turn your joy into a downcast look

Being sorrowful includes feelings of sadness, grief, and regret. Sinners must be sorrowful about their offenses against God before he will forgive them. Mourning is an expression of sorrow. Weeping is a more intense expression of sorrow and pain. The more serious sins should evoke weeping, because the more serious sins are more harmful.

Genuine repentance means turning your laughter into mourning. Recognizing how sins cause God’s Holy Spirit to grieve should cause every sinner to quit laughing and start mourning. Feelings of joy should be turned into a downcast look. A sinner’s downcast look should not only display an attitude of humility, but also feelings of guilt and shame. When a sinner makes himself lower in the sight of God, including those feelings and expressions of sorrow, God will lift him up. God lifts us all up when we remain penitent and humble before him. As Solomon said, **“The reward of humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches and honor and life”** (Proverbs 22:4). But remember, like the healing of serious injuries to our body, those things take time and effort.

## Speaking against each other

- **Speak not against each other, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against law and judges law. But if thou judge law, thou are not a doer of law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, but thou, who are thou who judge the other man?** (James 4:11-12).

What James means by speaking against a brother and judging a brother is to pass a condemning judgment against him. And we have no personal right to pass a condemning judgment against a brother. Condemning judgments can only be made by appointed authorities after a careful investigation. And they can only make their judgments based upon righteous laws.

Hence, whoever speaks against and passes a condemning judgment against a brother who has not been formally condemned by law, speaks against law and judges law. Such a man is saying that the law is not good enough to condemn the brother. Therefore, he goes beyond the law with his condemnation. Such a man is judging the law as being inadequate, thus making himself a judge above the law. Instead of obeying the judgment of law, he makes his own judgment.

And what James said about speaking against law and judging law applies not just to the laws of the land, but to the laws of God. That means speaking against a brother and judging a brother about things within the church and about our relationships with each other is wrong. It is wrong unless the elders involved have investigated the brother and judged him guilty. Unless that has been done, it is wrong to speak against a brother and judge a brother.

For, as James says, **“There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy ... .”** That lawgiver is the Lord God. And we have no right to speak against a brother and judge a brother whom God has not judged through the authority of the congregational elders. And the appropriate elders must themselves judge only by the laws of God, which laws are found in the writings of the Bible. Beware, therefore, of speaking against a brother and judging a brother. For who are thou who would condemn another brother?

If we have evidence of a man’s unrepentant guilt, it is our duty to inform the congregational elders. It is then their duty to investigate and pass judgment on the man. If the elders fail, then God will judge them, and we should seek a more obedient congregation.

## The morrow

- **Go now, men who say, Today and tomorrow we will go into this city, and will operate one year there, and will engage in trade and will get gain—men who know not of the morrow. For what is your life? For it will be a vapor that appears for a little while, and then also vanishes away—in place of your saying, If the Lord should will, then we will live and do this or that. But now ye boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil** (James 4:13-16).

In that passage James is emphasizing how much we depend on God. And James gives the example of planning to engage in business activities. Planning for the future without recognizing and appreciating the Lord God is boasting in arrogance. Such boasting is evil because without God we can do nothing.

The material world just does not operate with the order it has by itself. God's continuing supply of energy is what keeps the world functioning and enables us to perform. And his continual maintenance of the laws of nature is what enables us to plan for the future. I explain how he does those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Therefore, planning for the future without recognizing and appreciating Almighty God is boasting in arrogance. The right and just thing for us, is to say, **"If the Lord should will, then we will live and do this or that."** It is right and just for us to recognize and appreciate our Creator God and all that he has done and continues to do for us.

James also reminds us of how short and frail our lives are. Just ask any man who has suffered a serious injury or disease, and he will tell you how frail our lives are. And just ask any elderly man and he will tell you how short our lives are. Our lives are like a vapor or a wisp of smoke relative to existence in this vast world. And there is nothing any of us can do about it. The richest and most powerful men have tried in vain to keep themselves from dying.

Eternal life is only possible through the salvation of Jesus Christ. Remember what 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). And that salvation can only come if we humble ourselves, repent of our sins, and believe and obey the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

## The sin of knowing but not doing

- **He therefore who knows to do good, and is not doing it, to him it is sin**  
(James 4:17).

It is not enough for us to simply avoid disobeying the "thou shall not" commands of God. Not doing good is also disobeying him. Remember the parable of the servants who were given talents to invest. The man who was given five talents made five other talents, and likewise the man who was given two talents made two more talents. The lord of those servants praised those men for doing good with what he gave them.

However, the man who was given one talent did not use it. Here is what the lord of those servants 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 25:26-30).

We must use whatever the Lord God has given us to do good. We must do good works and bear fruit in righteousness. For we are going to be judged by our works. Remember what John said that he saw in his vision of the end of the world: **“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. 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 20:11-13).

Notice however, that James qualified what he said about doing good. He said, **“He therefore who knows to do good ... .”** We must first learn what is good before we can do it. And it is just as much our duty to learn what is good as doing good itself. That is another reason why it is so important to continually study the Bible, the word of God.

## Future miseries of the rich

- **Go now, ye rich, weep, howling for your miseries that are approaching** (James 5:1).

The Bible has never said anything good about the rich. Although there have been a few times in the Bible record when it mentions a rich man who was worthy of heaven. Both Job and Abraham were rich men. However, the great majority of rich men are too committed to their wealth to give themselves to Christ and his righteousness.

That is why 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).

The miseries that are approaching the rich will be caused by the lake of fire, which is reserved for all unrepentant sinners. If the rich knew those miseries were in their future, they would indeed weep and howl.

## Wealth decaying

- **Your wealth has decayed, and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have cankered, and their corrosion will be testimony against you, and will eat your flesh like fire. Ye have hoarded in the last days** (James 5:2-3).

Everything in this world eventually disintegrates. Even gold and silver eventually wears away. It may take many centuries, but everything that is used in this world wears away. The ancient Pharaoh's of Egypt stored many of their riches in hidden burial vaults. Those treasures have been very slow to disintegrate because they were hidden in a very dry climate. I have seen pictures of some of those treasures. They are all useless junk, of value only to collectors who like to look at them and boast about them. And if anyone tried to use them they would soon disintegrate like everything else.

James said the disintegrating treasures of the rich will be testimony to the vanity of their lives. Their selfishly hoarded treasures will eat their flesh like fire. Unrestricted fire is a violent force that destroys and consumes. And that is what their selfishly hoarded treasures do to their souls. When this life is over, all that will remain of them will be their naked spirits suffering in the lake of fire called hell.

We who belong to Christ will be given new incorruptible bodies in heaven. But the rich will exist as naked spirits in hell because of their selfishness. We will possess everything with Christ our Lord, but they will possess nothing. They will weep and howl, but we will laugh together and rejoice. Almighty God has promised those things.

Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“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.**

**“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.**

**“However, woe to you the rich, because ye have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, because ye will hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, because ye will mourn and weep”** (Luke 6:20-25).

## Defrauding the workmen

- **Behold the wage of the workmen who reaped your fields. The man who was defrauded by you cries out. And the outcries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts. Ye have lived in luxury on the earth, and were self-indulgent. Ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter** (James 5:4-5).

Most rich men are very greedy, taking much more than they give. That is how most of them become rich. And they usually do it legally. Sometimes, as James said, they even drag people into the courts. They use the legal systems, crafting things like lengthy contracts written in legalise displayed in fine print to prey upon people. They manipulate people so they can gain the advantage and enrich themselves. There are countless things men have contrived to enrich themselves at the expense of other people.

Selfish employers require their workmen to do the labor and take most of the risks, while they take most of the profits. James gives the example of the rich farmer who defrauds his workmen. A rich farmer who defrauds his workmen is a man who pays them the least possible wage. That enables the rich farmer to live in luxury, while his workmen live in poverty. Those are the kinds of men that James is condemning.

There are many countries in the world where the rich defraud their employees, paying them what we call slave wages. They are supported by the ruling class. The poor who are defrauded are unable to do anything because they have no power. They must work for such men or starve. In contrast, those countries that have been most influenced by the true Spirit of Christ have established many safeguards against the rich defrauding their work-

men. That is a major reason why so many poor people from other lands want to live in America.

The rich who live in luxury on the earth, and are self-indulgent, are preparing themselves for punishment in hell, because God hears the outcries of the workmen they defrauded. Their selfish greed has corrupted their souls, making them unfit to be sons of God in heaven. And their corrupted spirits will be slaughtered by the second death of hell when this life is over.

## Murdering the righteous man

- **Ye have condemned, ye have murdered the righteous man. He is not hostile to you** (James 5:6).

Condemning and murdering men can be done in different ways. The rich who prey upon their workmen condemn them to poverty. And their poverty shortens their lives. In that way the rich murder the righteous man. It may be legal by the laws of men, but in the eyes of God it is murder.

No righteous man is hostile to the rich. He is not trying to compete against the rich man. Unlike the greedy rich man, the righteous man only wants to do honest work to earn a fair living for himself and his family. No righteous man deserves being defrauded and kept in poverty.

Rich men need to hearken to proverbs like this one: **“He who stops his ears at the cry of a poor man, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard”** (Proverbs 21:13). The selfish rich man who defrauds his workmen will cry out from the fires of hell, but he will not be heard.

## Be ye patient

- **Be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, until it receives the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient. Establish your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has approached** (James 5:7-8).

As righteous men and honest workmen, we as disciples of Christ, need only be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord. It is not for us to avenge ourselves because of fraud and other oppressions against us. God will avenge for us. God commonly uses the rulers of a land to protect its citizens and apply vengeance to those who oppress us. When the rulers fail in that duty, then God will punish those sinful rulers in his own time and way.

James also gave the example of the righteous farmer who waits patiently for his crops to grow. It is God who causes the growth of the crops. He is who brings the precious fruit of the earth. It is our duty to work with him. We must live righteously and work productively, and then wait for his blessings.

After the farmer cultivates the ground and plants the seeds, he cannot sit idly and simply wait for the growth. He must help his crops get the water it needs, and he must combat the weeds and the pests that would attack his crops. In the same way we must not sit idly wait-

ing for the Lord's blessings. We must be patient, but actively patient, having a working patience.

That way we will receive his blessings. Although sometimes the injustice of the world will take it away from us, as Solomon said: **"Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is that is consumed because of injustice"** (Proverbs 13:23). Nevertheless, if because of injustice, oppression, persecution, or for some other evil reason, we are not given a harvest for our labors, God has promised much greater blessings in heaven after this life is over. He wants to bless those who love and obey him, and he eventually does.

Moses gave a long list of the Lord's blessings to the sons of Israel if they obeyed his commandments (see Deuteronomy 28:8-14). And Jesus listed ten blessings for the righteous, which we call the beatitudes (see Matthew 5:3-11). He also said to his apostles at the last supper, **"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). Therefore, we should be patient, and establish our hearts for his coming. That means to live so as to make ourselves worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

When James said the coming of the Lord had approached, that means the Son of God has already approached. He has already come into the world to redeem our souls and give us that great hope of eternal glory, which hope is called the good news. To approach means to come near. And the Son of God has truly come near to us by living in the world as a man. And now we are living in the last age, the age of Christ.

## Do not grumble against each other

- **Do not grumble, brothers, against each other, so that ye not be judged. Behold, the judge stands before the doors** (James 5:9).

There are many things in this troubled world that can provoke us to grumble. Even the best of us sometimes do things that offend and irritate others, sometimes even our wives and our Christian brothers. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to forgive such things if we want ourselves to be forgiven. We should not harbor grudges and resentments. We should not grumble against each other. When you are provoked to grumble, think of the times when you provoked someone else. That should certainly help you resist grumbling.

Jesus suffered many occasions from his disciples that could have provoked his grumbling, but he never grumbled. The most he did was to voice his disappointment and chide them. For example, remember this story about the storm at sea: **"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"** (Matthew 8:24-26).

Jesus was trying to get some sleep, but they woke him in fear of the storm. Jesus could have grumbled about that, but he only chided them for their lack of faith.

James said the judge stands before the doors. The judge is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doors are those in heaven. We are all going to stand before him to be judged after this life

is over. One door will be the entrance into the joys of heaven for his faithful disciples. Another door will be the entrance into the lake of fire called hell. If we are going to be judged by the Lord that way, then let us not grumble against each other. We should instead encourage each other, and help each other as we struggle to live righteously in this sinful world.

## Be longsuffering

- **Take an example, my brothers, of evil-suffering and longsuffering, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we regard those who endured, blessed. Ye have heard of the fortitude of Job, and have seen the outcome of the Lord, that he is very compassionate and merciful (James 5:10-11).**

James mentioned the evil-suffering and longsuffering of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Few people realize how much the prophets suffered. They suffered because they were righteous men, and they proclaimed the righteousness of God. And we who speak in the name of the Lord are also going to face evil-suffering. But we must be longsuffering if we remain faithful.

That is why Jesus gave a special blessing to us for being persecuted, when he said, **“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 prophets encountered evil-suffering because speaking in the name of the Lord includes rebuking and condemning sin. And that provokes persecution by sinners. An example of that is what happened to Stephen when he said to the rulers of the Jews, **“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). But instead of repenting, those Jews became enraged and stoned him to death.

However, we regard blessed those men who endured such suffering. We regard them blessed because God has given them a special place with him in heaven. For example, John told how he saw those who had been killed for the cause of God and Christ were cared for in heaven.

John gave this description: **“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).

James gave the example of the fortitude of the man Job. Read the first part of the book of Job to see the enormous suffering that he experienced. Read the last part of the book to see how much God blessed him after he faithfully endured. And read everything in between to hear him tell how much he suffered.

Job was even condemned by his friends, who falsely accused him of being a great sinner because they thought everybody deserves the suffering they get. Yet in heaven God said about Job, **“Have thou considered my servant 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).

Nevertheless, Job never accused God of anything except not telling him why he was suffering. God later told Job we cannot understand everything. We just need to trust him and be patient when we suffer, because he will always bless us eventually.

### Swear not

- **But above all things, my brothers, swear not. Neither by the heaven, nor the earth, nor any other oath, but let your yes be yes, and the no, no, so that ye may not fall into hypocrisy** (James 5:12).

The command Jesus gave against swearing is recorded in what we call his sermon on the mount (see Matthew 5:33-37). I explain what he meant in my commentary of that passage. His command was for what we as his disciples say to each other. It was not against legal oaths. Those are necessary in a world of sinners. Swearing carries a legal penalty for lying to discourage it. However, we as the disciples of Christ need no such things. We should always be truthful. Swearing is needed for sinners, not among us.

James said that swearing puts us at risk of falling into hypocrisy. Speaking the truth about some things and lying about other things is hypocrisy. If we were to swear to each other about some things, that would make it easier for us to lie about other things. We could develop the attitude that truthfulness was only required for things that we swear to. That is the way sinners think, and they act accordingly. Nevertheless, it is hypocrisy and deserves condemnation.

### Being afflicted and being cheerful

- **Is any man among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise** (James 5:13).

Whether we are afflicted or are cheerful, we should always be thinking about our heavenly Father. When we are afflicted we should pray to him. We should pray to him because he loves us, and he has the power to carry us through whatever afflictions we suffer. Suffering is part of living in this world, even for those who love and obey God. Indeed, remember how Paul said that **“it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). However, when we pray to our Father in heaven he will strengthen us and help us to endure.

Regarding being cheerful, it is, alas, human nature to forget God when things are going well. Nevertheless, for we who are his children, we should always remember him, and be grateful to him for our blessings whether in times of joy or sorrow. When we are cheerful we should sing praises to him. When we are sorrowful we should pray to him.

Dear reader, the closer you bring yourself to God, through your faith and your continual study of his holy word, the Bible, you will want to pray to him when you are afflicted. And you will also want to sing praises to him (although not necessarily aloud.) when you are cheerful. Praying and singing praises become more natural to you. That is one of the benefits of continually building your faith in him and your knowledge about him and his will for us. And there is no greater joy than being close to God.

## The weak among you

- **Is any man weak among you? Let him summon the elders of the congregation, and let them pray near him, having anointed him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will rescue him who is depressed, and the Lord will rouse him** (James 5:14-15).

The weak man in that passage refers to those who become depressed and have a broken spirit. In two proverbs Solomon told how debilitating a broken spirit can be. One of them says, **“A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones”** (Proverbs 17:22). Dried bones happen after death, and a broken spirit is like death. It is like death in the sense of causing a man to become gloomy, sedentary, and inactive.

The other proverb says, **“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a broken spirit who can bear?”** (Proverbs 18:14). There are some infirmities that are very severe. If a man can keep his spirit up, he can endure the worse kind. What really defeats a man is a broken spirit because it is unbearable. A broken spirit causes a man to give up and quit trying.

I once saw an otherwise healthy woman quit wanting to live, and she soon died because her spirit was broken. Major depression can be life-threatening, especially for suicide. Therefore, it should not be taken lightly either by the man suffering depression or by those who know of it.

For those of us who have faith in God, depression can be cured by the prayers of the elders of the congregation. The afflicted man should summon the elders for their prayers. Regardless of how depressed a Christian can become, his faith in God and his holy word should cause him to obey what James commanded.

Such prayers by the elders in his presence would have at least two valuable effects. First, it shows their love for him and their concern about him. By coming that way it would be very encouraging to him. Secondly and more importantly, as James says, **“And the prayer of faith will rescue him who is depressed, and the Lord will rouse him.”** Our heavenly Father can do anything, and he has promised to answer our prayers.

Notice how James also said the elders should anoint the man with olive oil in the name of the Lord. Anointing the body with such oil has been used beneficially for thousands of years. Anointing the man that way would be more than a simple ritual. It would both

soothe his body with their touch, and help arouse his spirit. And it should always be done in the name of the Lord. That will help show the credit for his recovery will be given to God, and not to men.

## His sins will be forgiven

- **And if he should be a man who has committed sins, they will be forgiven him** (James 5:15).

When James says “**if he should be a man who has committed sins**” he is speaking about the man who is weak because of depression. For we have all committed sins, even the best of us. Only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was able to live without sin.

Hence, James is referring to the man with depression, because depression is sometimes caused by feelings of guilt. If the man’s depression was caused by his sin, James says they will be forgiven him if he summons the elders to pray near him.

Now I must again explain the Bible meaning of forgiveness. Unlike the popular idea that forgiveness is absolute and all encompassing, the Bible concept of forgiveness is always limited. Consider the following example.

Suppose the man who was weak because of depression had robbed a bank. If he summoned the elders to pray near him, would he be completely forgiven of his robbery? Would he be allowed to keep the money he stole? Certainly not. Hence, forgiveness does not mean the guilty man would keep the benefits of his sin. Would the man escape being arrested and punished as a criminal? Certainly not. Hence, forgiveness does not mean escaping all punishment.

Forgiveness in the Bible sense requires genuine repentance, making an effort to recompense harm done, and accepting whatever punishment is appropriate. Forgiveness in the Bible sense means not being condemned and rejected. God will not reject the weak man with depression because of his sins. They will be forgiven, but he will still bear responsibility for them. The only absolute and all encompassing forgiveness is the spiritual salvation we receive from Jesus Christ. I say much more about forgiveness in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and in the appendix of my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## The power of prayer

- **Confess ye the trespasses to each other, and pray for each other so that ye may be healed. A working supplication of a righteous man is very powerful. Elijah was a man of the same nature as we. And by prayer, he asked for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit** (James 5:16-18).

What James means by being healed does not include our every physical infirmity. He is speaking about the need for spiritual healing, such as the weakness of depression, a broken

spirit. By confessing our guilt to each other, and praying for each other, God will heal us of such things.

Confessing our trespasses is a humbling experience, and is necessary for forgiveness. However, we are not commanded to confess publicly every sin we may commit. If our sin is a public one, then we do need to confess it publicly before the congregation and asked for their prayers. If our sin is against another brother, then we need to confess it to him and ask for his prayers. We need to confess our trespasses to those who know about them. That is the first step in repenting and being forgiven. Think of the confusion that would arise if every Christian confessed every transgression he ever made to every other Christian. That is not what God wants of us.

Remember the command Jesus gave about sins against a brother: **“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. But if he is also heedless of the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the tax collector”** (Matthew 18:15-17).

James said a working supplication of a righteous man was very powerful. It is very powerful because it is an appeal to Almighty God who can do anything, and he has promised to hear our prayers. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles, **“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).

Asking in the name of Christ includes asking for things that are good and right and just, not just anything. What we ask must be according to his will, according to things that are helpful and beneficial. As 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. 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).

Notice how James said “a working” supplication. That means we must do whatever we can to help fulfill what we pray for. James used the example of the prophet Elijah. First Kings 17-18 tells the story of how Elijah prayed that it not rain in Israel, and then later how he prayed for it to rain again. Elijah prayed for that long period of drought to prove to the people (who had become idol worshipers) that Jehovah is their God.

Elijah worked very hard for Jehovah, trying to bring his people back to him. Elijah warned the evil king Ahab that there would be no rain except by his word. Elijah’s was a working supplication. He did not just utter the words and then do nothing. Now that does not mean every thing we pray for must be a working supplication. For there are many things that we can do nothing about. James is simply saying a working supplication is especially powerful.

Notice also how James said that Elijah was a man of the same nature as we. Too many people think that the prophets of God were special kinds of men unlike the rest of us. That is not true; they were of the same nature as we are. They were ordinary men having to struggle to live right in this sinful world just as we do. What made them special was their

faith in God and their commitment to him. And we can develop the same kind of faith and commitment if we apply ourselves.

## Converting a sinful man

- **Brothers, if any man among you may be led astray from the truth, and some man converts him, let him know that he who converts a sinful man from his wandering way, will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins** (James 5:19-20).

What James means by “any man among you” is any man among those that you associate with, not just a fellow Christian. Remember how Paul said that God wants all men to be saved: **“I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men, for kings and all those who are in prominence, so that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and propriety. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth”** (First Timothy 2:1-4).

Converting a sinner from his wandering ways, means to cause him to repent of his sins and follow Jesus Christ. That will save his soul from death, because every unrepentant sinner will suffer the second death of hell. For God said to John during his great vision of heaven, **“He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me. 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 21:7-8).

Covering a multitude of sins means to prevent them from happening. We all have the potential to commit many sins. Remember, early in the history of mankind, Jehovah said, **“... the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). Therefore, we must use the power of our will to prevent that evil from being expressed. That is what James meant by covering sins. Our potential for sins must be suppressed and concealed. The evil nature of our flesh must be covered and suppressed by the power of our spirit. And by converting a sinful man from his wandering ways will cause him to do it.

# A Commentary on The First Letter of Peter

## His salutation

- **Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (First Peter 1:1-2).**

Peter addressed his book to the Jews because Paul said Peter was entrusted with the good news of Christ for the Jews (men of circumcision): “... **when they [the Jews of Jerusalem] 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 when they understood the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas [Peter] and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship. So that we were for the Gentiles, and they for men of circumcision ...**” (Galatians 2:7-9).

Peter addressed his book specifically to the Christian Jews at Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those were all provinces in what is now the country of Turkey, which comprises the greater part of Asia Minor. Remember, the Dispersion refers to the Hebrews who had been scattered among other nations after their country had been destroyed.

James in his book wrote to all the Jewish Christians of the Dispersion. While Peter wrote here to the Jewish Christians who lived in those five provinces that he named. Why Peter named those particular places is not told. Perhaps there was a greater concentration of Jews there.

Peter called them the chosen who were sojourners of the Dispersion. They were sojourners of the Dispersion because they or their ancestors had been forced to migrate to various other nations. They were forced to be sojourners from their native Israel by their conquerors, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Although they were sojourners that way, they settled in those Gentile lands and remained there even when they were able to return after Israel was rebuilt.

Peter said they were “**chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.**” They were chosen by God because they believed and obeyed Jesus the Christ. They were chosen that way according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. That means before the world began.

Speaking about that, Paul said, “**Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, for us to be holy and unblemished before him in love. Who predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the desire of his will ...**” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Remember however, God does not choose our soul's salvation by partiality. He chooses according to how we have lived, which is what we decide. For every one of us had and continues to have the potential to live many different kinds of lives. Those who use their own free will to believe and obey Christ are the ones that God chooses. I, the faithful Walter Lee Porter, am the man God chose in him before the foundation of the world. The unrepentant sinner Walter Lee Porter will never be chosen. And God gave me Walter Lee Porter the power to decide for myself which man I will be.

I have chosen to be the faithful Walter Lee Porter, and the way I live is proving it. Therefore, God chose me according to his foreknowledge, **“in sanctification of Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”** God calls us all that way, giving us the freedom to hearken to him or not. I am exceedingly grateful that my beloved wife Genelle Hager Porter has also chosen to be faithful to God. And the good way she lives is proving it.

And not us only, for as Paul said about himself, **“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).

All those who have loved his appearing, meaning all who believe and obey Christ have been chosen by God that way in sanctification of Spirit. Remember, sanctification means set apart and made holy. And every disciple of Christ now belongs to the kingdom of God, which is not of the world; it is apart from the world. We have also been made holy through our redemption by Christ, and by God's Holy Spirit that dwells in us.

We were chosen, in sanctification of Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Remember, the blood of Christ is what cleaned us from all sin, and made us holy and right before God. We are sprinkled with his blood in a figurative sense. The shedding of his innocent blood was the perfect sacrifice that enabled him to cleanse us of our sins. The book of Hebrews explains those things in much more detail.

We were also chosen that way for obedience. God chose us to obey him. That means we were chosen to live righteously according to his will, and to bear the good fruits of righteousness. Those who neglect to obey him that way are forsaking their calling. And if they continue to disobey he will again reject them. They will fall from his grace. Remember the warning that the author of Hebrews gave: **“Looking carefully lest any man fall short, away from the grace of God ...”** (Hebrews 12:15).

## Grace and peace

- **Grace to you, and peace be multiplied** (First Peter 1:2).

That same call for grace and peace was given by Paul in most of his books. Peter made that call in both of his books, but he added that their grace and peace be multiplied. Grace from God is unearned favor from him, and our salvation through Christ is by his grace. However, there are many other ways that God can multiply his grace for us.

Regarding peace, we will never have full peace in this life because it is a constant battle between good and evil. However, we can have the inner spiritual peace that Paul said sur-

passes all understanding: **“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).

## Begotten again

- **Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begot us again according to his abundant mercy ...** (First Peter 1:3).

Notice how Peter said that God was the Father of Jesus Christ, and he wrote this well after Christ ascended into heaven. That is just another of many scriptures showing how false the doctrine of the trinity is. For how could God be his Father in heaven if Christ was not his Son there? And being his Son in heaven means Christ was begotten by him in heaven, not just on the earth. And being a Son means he is subordinate to God the Father.

Peter said that God begot us again, begot us again in spirit. Remember what Jesus said when Nicodemus wondered how any man could be begotten again: **“If any man is not begotten from water and the 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).

God begot us again according to his abundant mercy. That means the reason he begot us again was because of his abundant mercy toward us. It was not something we earned from him. It was not something we deserved. It was because of his abundant mercy. However, only those who believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ are begotten again. Our faith and obedience is what qualifies us to be begotten again.

Remember, our true being is our eternal spirit; our flesh is merely a temporary housing for it. Being begotten again means our eternal spirit is completely renewed. That happens when we repent and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. Our old defiled spirit dies in that watery burial, and when we rise from that water we have a renewed and purified spirit. How that all happens is a great mystery because, as Jesus said, like the wind, it is invisible to us.

Remember how Paul explained that watery burial: **“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 watery burial symbolizes the death of our old corrupted spirit. And that is when our spirit is begotten again to walk in newness of life. And the blood of Christ keeps our newly begotten spirit pure as long as we belong to him by remaining faithful.

Paul referred to that process as putting off our old man to put on our new man: **“Do not lie to each other, having stripped off the old man with his practices, and having put on**

the new man, being renewed in knowledge according to an image of him who created him..." (Colossians 3:9-10).

## Begotten again for a living hope

- ... for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, for an inheritance imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, reserved in the 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).

We were begotten again for a living hope. In this vain world every hope perishes. As Solomon said, **"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). However, being begotten again in Christ gives us a living hope, a hope of eternal life in the imperishable world of heaven.

We have that living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have that hope because, after Jesus' life of perfect obedience to God culminating in his death on the cross, Jesus was resurrected from the dead and taken up to heaven to prepare a place for us there. For Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper, **"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).

That living hope is for an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading and reserved for us in the heavens. Remember how Paul said that we the disciples of Christ are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: **"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).

Being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ means we have the greatest inheritance possible. For Christ is the King of kings and Lord of Lords, reigning in heaven with God over all things. That inheritance is imperishable, meaning it never fails; it will be eternal because we will live eternally. It is undefiled because it is in heaven where there is no corruption and pollution. And it is unfading because it will never diminish or weaken. Our inheritance is reserved in the heavens for us. It is waiting for us to receive when Christ comes and takes us home to be in heaven with him after our sojourn in this life is over.

Peter also says we are **"men being kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."** God is preserving our souls by his great power, protecting us from all our enemies. He is keeping us so that we can become his sons for eternity in heaven. However, he only does it through our faith in him and his Son Jesus Christ. Without that faith we have no hope.

God is keeping our souls for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Our salvation is the redemption of our sins through Christ. Through him we are saved from eternal condemnation with the devil and the demons. Peter said that salvation will be revealed in the last time. The last time has two meanings. It means that after the last time of our lives here upon the earth our salvation will be revealed to us. It also means that after this world ends

it will be revealed to all of mankind. Not for their salvation, but for their judgment, to show them what they rejected for themselves.

## Trials to prove our faith

- **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 1:6-7).

Peter said they (those Jewish Christians) greatly rejoiced because of their living hope, the imperishable inheritance reserved in the heavens for them. They rejoiced even though they were made sorrowful in various trials. Our sorrows and sufferings are called trials because God is testing our souls to see who is worthy to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

Peter said those various trials are necessary for a little while. They are necessary so that the proof of our faith may be found. The proof of our faith needs to be discovered and revealed. Consider the example of the faith of Abraham. Jehovah had commanded him to sacrifice the life of his only son Isaac (the son of promise from his wife Sarah) as a burnt offering.

Abraham went to the place God told him, he prepared everything for the sacrifice, and then **“stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son”** (Genesis 22:10). At the last moment Jehovah stopped him and 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 22:12).

The proof of the faith of Abraham was found through that agonizing trial (which he will never again give to any man, just as there will never again be a world wide flood). God honored Abraham for his great faith by making him the (spiritual) father of all who trust God (see Romans 4:11).

Therefore, we should greatly rejoice, even when we are made sorrowful in various trials. The proof of our faith needs to be proven by various trials, sometimes even being proven by fire. Being proven by fire means being subjected to very severe trials, similar to that of Abraham and his son in severity to us.

Yet because of the knowledge we now have through the Bible we can greatly rejoice in spite of being made sorrowful that way. We can greatly rejoice knowing that the proof of our faith will be found **“for praise and honor and for glory at the revealing of Jesus Christ.”** Christ will be revealed when this world is over. And then all who belong to him will receive praise and honor and glory, reigning in heaven with him.

Peter said our faith was much more precious than gold that perishes. Gold is the most durable of all substances. Yet in this world of corruption even gold eventually wears away with use. In contrast, our faith will never fail us. Our faith in God and Christ, trusting and obeying them, is the most precious thing we can have. For it is through our faith that we can become sons of God for eternity.

## The outcome of our faith

- **Whom, not having seen, ye love, in whom, not now seeing but believing, ye exult in inexpressible and glorified joy, receiving back the outcome of your faith, the salvation of souls** (First Peter 1:8-9).

Only a few have ever seen Christ, and only a minority of those who did see him believed in him and loved him. We who believe still love him even though we have never seen him. We believe in him because of the testimony about him that has been recorded in the Holy Bible. Through the power of the Holy Spirit faithful men like Peter wrote about Christ. And from what we have learned about Christ that way we love him.

We cannot see Christ in the flesh, but we still believe in him and love him. We believe in him because of what we have learned about him. We love him because we love truth and righteousness, and Jesus is the very personification of truth and righteousness.

And by believing in him and loving him we exult in inexpressible and glorified joy. We joy that way because we receive back the outcome of our faith, which outcome is the salvation of our souls. Who could not exult in inexpressible and glorified joy if he knew what great salvation he would receive?

Indeed, the greater your faith in Christ and your love of him, the greater you will exult in inexpressible and glorified joy. That joy will be in your heart, even though you are made sorrowful by various trials and tribulations of the flesh. Therefore, keep reading and studying the Bible so that your faith in Christ and love for him will grow, and you can be assured of the salvation of your soul. Almighty God our Creator guarantees it.

## The prophets sought and searched diligently

- **About which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently** (First Peter 1:10).

It was about the salvation of souls that the prophets sought and searched diligently. That salvation is not about this life; it is about eternal life. Hence, the prophets sought and searched diligently about eternal life. They sought and searched diligently because God did not reveal much about it during Old Testament times. Knowledge about our hope for eternal life is one reason the message of Christ is called the good news.

Only one passage in the Old Testament speaks of eternal life directly: **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”** (Daniel 12:2). The other Old Testament passages only allude to eternal life.

Here are some examples:

**For Jehovah is righteous. He loves righteousness. The upright man shall behold his face** (Psalm 11:7).

**Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah forever** (Psalm 23:6).

... man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets ... and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:5-7).

**But go thou thy way [Daniel] till the end is. For thou shall rest, and shall stand in thy lot at the end of the days (Daniel 12:13).**

## Searching for what, or what kind of time

- **Men who prophesied about the grace for you, searching for what, or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ in them indicated, predicting the sufferings in Christ, and the glories after these things (First Peter 1:10-11).**

There are many prophesies about Christ in the Old Testament, perhaps several hundred. No exact number has been determined because there is no common agreement about all of them. The most famous of the prophesies about the sufferings of Christ is from the book of Isaiah (see Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12). Isaiah also prophesied about the glories of the new heavens and earth that would come afterward (see Isaiah 65:17-25).

The grace for us that was prophesied was God's new covenant for mankind, which is Christ's good news of our eternal salvation. God has made many covenants with men. The new covenant through Christ is the last and greatest of them all. That new covenant is indeed grace for us, and it was prophesied well before Christ brought it.

The men who prophesied searched for what, or what kind of time the Spirit of Christ in them indicated. They were not robots, passively proclaiming the words of God. Just as the prophet Elijah, they were men **"of the same nature as we"** (James 5:17). They were curious about what they were told. They were **"searching for what, or what kind of time."**

Remember how Jesus' disciples inquired of him when he told them of the future 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.**

**"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 24:1-3).

Notice how Peter said it was the Spirit of Christ in those prophets that indicated **"the sufferings in Christ, and the glories after these things."** The Spirit of Christ is the force that works in the sons of obedience, just as the devil is **"the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience"** (Ephesians 2:2). The Spirit of Christ works together with God's Holy Spirit in us, just as it worked in those men who prophesied of him.

## To whom it was revealed

- **To whom it was revealed, that they were serving not themselves, but you, those things that were now reported to you by those who preached good**

**news to you in the Holy Spirit, which was sent forth from heaven, into which things agents longed to stoop to see** (First Peter 1:12).

God did reveal to those prophets that they were serving not themselves, but us about **“the sufferings in Christ, and the glories after these things.”** Those things have now been reported to us by those who preached the good news to us in the Holy Spirit. They first preached the good news of Christ, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, and then they wrote and recorded the words as the New Testament scriptures. Thus, the words of the good news of Christ were sent forth from heaven by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, making them part of the word of God.

Peter said that (heavenly) agents longed to stoop to see those things that have been reported to us now in the words of the New Testament. The devil has so blinded the hearts of unbelievers that they cannot see what a great privilege it is to be able to see what is now revealed in the words of the New Testament. Agents from heaven longed to stoop to see into those things, which have now been reported to us.

It is interesting that Peter said the agents longed to stoop to see. To stoop means to bow down and lower yourself. Stooping before something is an act of humility. The agents of heaven longed to be able to do that so they could see into the things that we now have so freely available to us.

And if we want to see into those things we too must stoop, we must humble ourselves. Not in any kind of physical act, but in our spirit. As James said, **“But he who stooped to look into the perfect law, the one of liberty, and who remained, this man, who did not become a forgetful hearer but a doer of work, this man will be blessed in his doing”** (James 1:25).

Those who genuinely want to know about the things of the good news of Christ and the glories to come, they must forsake all pride, humble themselves, and receive the word of God in the Bible as it truly is, the word of God for us.

Those who scoff at the Bible will never see those things that the agents of heaven longed to stoop to see. As Solomon said, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not ...”** (Proverbs 14:6). They may acquire some information in it or about it, but they will never understand the true meaning of its knowledge.

### Hope entirely for the grace

- **Therefore having girded up the loins of your mind, being sober, hope entirely for the grace brought to you at the revealing of Jesus Christ** (First Peter 1:13).

Remember, girding up your loins is an expression that refers to preparing yourself for action. Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind means to prepare your mind for action. Peter is saying we should develop a state of mind that is suitable for the living hope we have, ready to endure whatever trials we may face.

Keep yourself sober and serious minded about your life. Be not like the sinners who love to stupefy themselves with drugs and liquor, and indulge themselves in wanton revelry. I continually marvel at how barbaric my countrymen have become since they decided to

forsake God and be pagan, and it grieves my soul. As disciples of Christ we must gird up the loins of our minds and be sober.

Instead of hoping for the vain pleasures of this life, we must hope entirely for the grace brought to us when Christ came into this world. He brought us the opportunity to become sons of God for eternity instead of being condemned to hell with the devil and the demons. That is the fabulous gift of God's grace he brought to us. Do not lose it by pursuing the sinful pleasures of this vain life.

## Become holy in all conduct

- **As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves to the former desires in your ignorance, but according to the Holy Man, he who called you, ye yourselves also become holy in all conduct, because it is written, Become ye holy, since I am holy** (First Peter 1:14-16).

As Peter says, we are children of obedience. We live according to the will of God, obeying him, and not living in rebellion according to the will of the devil. For the Holy Spirit of God works in our minds, while the devil is the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience.

Paul wrote about those things, when he said, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16), and, **“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.**

**“Among whom we also all once behaved in the lusts of our flesh, doing the intentions of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath as also the others. But God, being rich in mercy, through his great love that he loved us, even us being dead in the transgressions, he made alive together with the Christ (ye are saved by grace), and raised us up together, and seated us together in the heavenly things in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:1-6).

Therefore, as children of obedience we cannot fashion ourselves to the former desires in our ignorance. Sinners live in ignorance because they have chosen the dark ways of the devil. He leads them astray because he is the spirit that works in them.

Ye must fashion yourselves according to the Holy Man, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, **“... him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”** (First Peter 2:9). If we want to be children of obedience, belonging to him, then we must also become holy in all conduct. Remember, holiness is cleanness and purity.

God is holy, as he said to the sons of Israel after he took them out of Egyptian bondage to make a nation of them, **“For I am Jehovah your God. Sanctify yourselves therefore, and become ye holy, since I am holy. Neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that moves upon the earth. For I am Jehovah who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. Ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy”** (Leviticus 11:44-45).

## Live the time of your sojourn in fear

- **And if ye call on a Father, him who judges impartially according to each man's work, live the time of your sojourn in fear** (First Peter 1:17).

We call God our Father because he has adopted us through his Son Jesus Christ. As Paul said, **“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”** (Romans 8:14-16).

However, our full adoption will be in heaven, when we become sons of God for eternity there. For Paul also said, **“And we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body”** (Romans 8:23).

Nevertheless, Peter said that even as our Father, God is going to judge us impartially according to each man's work. That is more evidence that there will be not only degrees of punishment in the afterlife, but also degrees of reward. For even as our Father, God is going to judge us impartially according to each man's work. He is always impartial.

Therefore, all the more we should live the time of our sojourn in fear. We should live in fear of being judged unworthy. For unless we use our time and resources to bear fruits of righteousness for him, we will be judged unworthy of our adoption in heaven.

Remember however, it is not the absolute amount of our work that will be judged, as is shown in this story of the poor widow: **“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).

Of course, God is not requiring us to give our whole living to support the work of the church. But we are required to sacrifice ourselves for him and his righteousness. For he 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).

## Redeemed by the blood of Christ

- **Knowing that ye were redeemed from your vain behavior inherited from fathers, not with perishable silver or gold, but by precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and unspotted—of Christ** (First Peter 1:18-19).

Christ earned the right to redeem our souls when he lived in the world as a man of flesh in perfect obedience to God, even to death on the cross. We all needed to be redeemed because of our debts to God caused by our sins, caused by our vain behavior inherited

from fathers. Otherwise we would have also been condemned to punishment in the fires of hell with the devil and the demons.

Sin is vain behavior. Adam was our first father, and he sinned against God. From the time of Adam every man (except Jesus Christ) has more or less sinned against God, doing some kind of vain behavior. And just as we all inherit our bodies of flesh from fathers, so also we inherit our vain behavior from them. While we are raised by them as their children we learn from them. And in that way we acquire various kinds of vain behavior from them, which condemns our souls to punishment in hell.

But Christ came into the world to redeem us from condemnation. He redeemed us not with perishable silver and gold, but by his own precious blood, which he willingly sacrificed on the cross. He did not deserve the shedding of his blood. He was like a lamb unblemished and unspotted. Unlike us, his spirit was completely unblemished and unspotted because, unlike us, he lived in perfect obedience to God his Father. Thus, he earned the right to redeem all who belong to him.

## Foreknown before the world

- **Who was indeed foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in the last times because of you: ...** (First Peter 1:20-22).

Jesus was foreknown by God before the foundation of the world. It was God's plan before the Creation to send his only begotten Son into the world to save our souls. God knew that mankind would sin against him. For no man can live in the this world without sin. As Paul said, **"For God has confined all men in disobedience, so that he might be merciful to all"** (Romans 11:32).

God made the world that way

to humble us by showing how imperfect we are  
to prove that his Son Jesus Christ was morally and spiritually superior  
to show his great mercy to those who love him

Christ proved it by living in this world without sin, and therefore he became qualified to save our souls. I explain those things much more in my books *The Law of God Before and After Christ*, and *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Thus, God foreknew the coming of Christ into the world even before its foundation, but he kept it a mystery until Christ was manifested. As Paul said, **"But we speak a wisdom of God in a hidden mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory ..."** (First Corinthians 2:7). God sent his Son into the world, not only to prove his moral and spiritual superiority, but also to redeem our souls and bring us to glory with him. He also came to defeat sin and wickedness.

The matter of Jesus being manifested in the last times simply means he appeared in the world during the last period of God's dealings with men. When Jesus came into the world he established the kingdom of God, which will last for eternity. Hence, Jesus was manifested in the last times, the times of the eternal kingdom of God, because nothing will supplant it. And he came here for our sakes, to redeem our souls for eternal salvation.

## Our faith and hope is to be in God

- **... men who, because of him, believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, in order for your faith and hope to be in God; ...** (First Peter 1:21).

The Jews who crucified Jesus claimed to believe in God, but the god they believed in was not the true and living God. They had an entirely false concept of who Jehovah really is and what he is like. As Jesus said to them, **“Ye know neither me, nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also”** (John 8:19).

We are those who believe in the true God, because we can see him in the life and teachings of his Son Jesus Christ. We believe in God because we accept the testimony of those who witnessed Jesus’ resurrection. And we believe the testimony of Jesus that God raised him up from the dead and gave him glory. We believe those things so that our faith and hope will be in God, the true and living God.

## Obey the truth and love each other

- **... men who have purified your souls in obedience of the truth through the Spirit for non-hypocritical brotherly love. Ye should love each other fervently from a pure heart, ...** (First Peter 1:22).

Peter said that our obedience of the truth is what purifies our souls. Peter told the Jews on the day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven how to purify their souls, when he said, **“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 that is the first step in obedience of the truth for every man.

Peter also said the purification of our souls is through the Spirit of God. Remember how Jesus told Nicodemus we must be begotten from water and the Spirit: **“Truly, truly, I say to thee, If any man is not begotten from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). Our souls are purified when we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them. And that makes us begotten again from the Spirit.

Peter spoke of that earlier, when he said, **“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 the 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).

And the purification of our souls is for non-hypocritical brotherly love. Genuine brotherly love is a virtue that every disciple must have. And we must love each other fervently. We must love each other fervently because Jesus our Lord and Savior loved us that way. His love for us was so great that he sacrificed his whole life, suffering many things for our sakes, so that he could redeem our souls from condemnation.

Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper about loving each other: **“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). Our brotherly love must always be non-hypocritical and fervent. And that can only happen when we purify our souls and hearts in obedience of the truth through the Holy Spirit that is now in us.

And our fervent love must be demonstrated and applied. Fervent love is useless when it is not expressed and applied. For Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5). Fervent love shared openly among disciples of Christ is a wonderful blessing; it is a very joyous and enlivening force among us.

Regarding truth, it is not reality itself; it is knowledge of reality. The computer monitor in front of me is not truth. Truth is knowledge of what is real. Although people see real things all around them, the devil has so blinded the world that few people know the truth about the greater reality beyond what they see.

For example, most of them believe in the fantastic theory of evolution, a fanciful but cleverly crafted idea about reality. And most of them are ignorant of the true Creator God. Also most of them have a false conception of what Jesus Christ is really like. And I could go on and on with many more examples.

It is through our faith in God and his holy word that we can have knowledge of the truth, knowledge of the genuine reality. By trusting what God has told us in the Bible we can know the truth; we can know what is truly real, especially in the spiritual realm. And we can know enough about the true reality to save our souls.

## Begotten again incorruptible

- **... begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God that lives and remains into the age** (First Peter 1:23).

We are begotten again in the spirit when we are immersed in Jesus Christ. 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).

Our newness of life is from being begotten again. Of course, we are not begotten again in the flesh, of corruptible seed, but spiritually from the Spirit of God, of incorruptible seed. And that happens through the word of God that lives and remains into the age. For it is through our obedience to the word of God that we can be begotten again that way.

An earthly seed consists of biochemical instructions for the growth and development of some kind of life form, as well as the nutrients needed to begin that growth. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit of God, from which we are begotten again, has given us the word of God, which contains the instructions we need to grow and develop in spirit. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us also energizes us through our conscience to live righteously before God.

## All flesh is as grass

- **Because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as a flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower of it falls away, but the word of the Lord endures into the age. And this is the word, the good news that was preached to you** (First Peter 1:24-25).

Peter gave the example of how our flesh is like the grass that withers, and the flower of it falls away. Indeed, everything in this world eventually withers and falls. In contrast, the word of the Lord endures into the age. That means it always endures.

And the word of the Lord, from which we are begotten again through immersion, is the good news of our salvation through Christ. That good news was first preached by Christ and his apostles. And it has been preached ever since by those who have become his disciples. The entire New Testament was written to give us an enduring record of that good news. That written record has been uncorrupted by the teachings of other men, so that we can always know what is the true good news of Christ. Although some bad translations of it have perverted some of its teachings.

## Put off all evil

- **Therefore, having put off all maliciousness and all deceit and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speaking, ...** (First Peter 2:1).

Peter listed five evils that we should put off from us:

maliciousness  
deceit  
hypocrisies  
envies  
evil speaking

Maliciousness is deliberately doing harm to innocent people. There are evil people in the world who get pleasure from being malicious and cruel to others. Vandals and sadists are examples. No man can be a disciple of Christ who does anything malicious. Anger and the desire for revenge can arouse maliciousness, but always resist it because it is evil.

Deceit is the giving of false information. The world makes light of deceit, but it is a deadly evil. Deceit is evil because it misleads and causes people to do things wrong and to fail. Deceit seems to be the major weapon Satan uses against us. Remember what Jesus said about him: **“When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, because he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44). Deceit is the opposite of giving truth. Therefore, we as disciples of Christ must put off all deceit.

We must also put off hypocrisies. Hypocrisy is pretending to be what you are not. Therefore, it is a form of deceit. Being hypocrites was one of the reasons why Jesus cursed the scholars and Pharisees and lawyers. For example, he said to them, **“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). And he went on to utter seven more woes against them and the lawyers because of their hypocrisy. To follow Jesus we must also put off hypocrisies from us.

Envy is wanting something that someone else has. Not wanting something similar, but wanting what they actually possess. We can admire someone for having things we too would like or would like to be. And sometimes that can motivate us to be more productive.

However, envy is an evil that every disciple of Christ must put off from him. It is an evil because it divides people and leads to injustices. No man can envy anyone and still love them, because envy wants to take away what they have. Remember however, envy is not jealousy. Jealousy is wanting to protect what you have, such as your wife and children. That is a virtue, although it can become a vice.

Evil speaking includes things like gossip, slander, and vulgar talk. As faithful Christians we must put off all evil speaking. Since America forsook God and became pagan, evil speaking has greatly multiplied. Filthy and vulgar talk, which was formerly condemned, is now commonly spoken and accepted. But the truth is, it is like wallowing in the mud. It makes people ugly.

Too often evil speaking like gossip is seen as harmless, and begins to infiltrate and spread among people. Solomon called a man who gossips a whisperer, because he does it on the sly. Solomon said about them, **“The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts”** (Proverbs 26:22).

Nevertheless, gossip is a great evil, because Solomon also said about it, **“A perverse man scatters abroad strife, and a whisperer separates chief friends”** (Proverbs 16:28), and, **“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention ceases”** (Proverbs 26:20). Therefore, put off gossip as well as all evil speaking.

## Long for spiritual nurturance

- **... 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 2:2-3).

Having been begotten again in spirit through the word of God, we should long for its genuine intellectual milk. We should long for it the way infant babes long for their mother’s milk. It is instinctive for them to long for it because it is necessary for them to grow. And the genuine milk of the word of God is necessary for us to grow in spirit.

It is necessary for us to grow in spirit because it is intellectual. That means it nourishes our intellect, which is our ability to reason and understand. And there is nothing in the world that increases and strengthens our intellect like the word of God. It has the power to make even the most humble man wise (except of course, for those who are greatly handicapped in their mental faculties).

Peter also said the intellectual milk of the word of God is genuine. Genuine means true and authentic. It is sad but true that there are many false teachings that claim to be the word of God. The popular teachings of salvation-by-faith-only, and once-saved-always-saved are counterfeit and false to the genuine intellectual milk of the word of God. The Roman Catholic system is also counterfeit to the genuine intellectual milk of the word of God. Study the word of God itself—the Holy Bible—and you can see what is genuine.

The intellectual milk of the word of God is genuine because only it can cause us to grow in our spirit. As Jesus said, **“It is written [in the law of Moses], Man will not live on bread alone, but on every word coming out through the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4).

Therefore, every disciple of Christ should eagerly seek to absorb the genuine word of God into our minds and our hearts. We should have a hunger for it. We should try to feed upon it often, because that way we can grow and become strong in our spirit. Failing to feed upon the genuine intellectual milk of the word of God will not only retard spiritual growth, but it will cause the spirit to weaken and eventually perish. Therefore, do not neglect to study the Bible often.

Peter spoke of tasting that the Lord is excellent. He said that because he was using the example of babes longing for their milk. When we read the word of God in the Bible, we are tasting its genuine intellectual milk. And if we find in the word of God that the Lord is excellent, then we will grow by it.

It is sad but true that when many souls hear the word of God they reject the Lord as offensive. They are like the Jews who said about Jesus when they heard him, **“He has a demon, and is mad. Why do ye listen to him?”** (John 10:20).

But for us who have tasted that the Lord is truly excellent, the genuine intellectual milk of the word of God will enable us to grow stronger in our spirit. Therefore, keep feeding your minds upon it. For it tells us how to obtain eternal life.

Nevertheless remember, Peter was speaking to newborn babes. It is when we are newborn babes in Christ that we should **“long for the genuine intellectual milk.”** With it we can grow in our knowledge of the word of God, and move beyond the elementary things of the good news of Christ. It was because the Corinthians did not grow that way, that Paul said to them, **“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).

## A holy priesthood

- **Coming to whom, a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but with God chosen, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ** (First Peter 2:4-5).

In the days of Daniel the prophet, king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that only Daniel was able to know and interpret. The dream was about a great image made of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay, which symbolized successive kingdoms. Here is the last part of what Daniel told the king about that dream:

**“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 moun-**

**tain, and filled the whole earth. This is the dream, and we will tell the interpretation of it before the king”** (Daniel 2:34-36).

And here is the interpretation Daniel gave about the great stone in the dream: **“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 2:44-45).

The stone in that dream symbolized the kingdom of God, the church that Jesus established. That stone is a living stone with Christ as the corner. And we who are his disciples comprise the rest of the stone, which Peter says is a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.

Jesus, the cornerstone, was rejected by men, but with God was chosen and precious. Although Jesus was rejected by men, and even crucified by them, he was chosen by God to be King of kings and Lord of lords over all things, reigning with God in heaven.

And we who are his disciples have become a holy priesthood, supplanting the old priesthood of the law of Moses. Instead of offering up animal sacrifices as they did, we offer up spiritual sacrifices, sacrifices that are now acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.

A sacrifice is the giving up of something of value for a higher cause. The animal sacrifices under the law of Moses were given up as both thank-offerings and for atonement of sins (which atonement was always temporary until Christ came). Spiritual sacrifices to God now are the giving up of our earthly lives for his sake; not the literal death of our bodies, but the death of our selfishness and worldliness.

Remember what Jesus said about that 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). That is the kind of sacrifice that is now acceptable to God.

## A chief corner stone

- **It is therefore contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, chosen, precious. And he who believes in him will, no, not be shamed. To you therefore who believe is the preciousness, but for men who disobey, A stone that the builders rejected, this became the head of the corner, and, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, men who stumble at the word, being disobedient, for which also they were set** (First Peter 2:6-8).

Peter quoted three Old Testament passages about Jesus as a stone. The one about God laying a corner stone is this one: **“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).

Jesus is our foundation. He was tried and proven. He is precious because he is the Son of God. And he is a sure foundation that will never fail. Therefore, he who believes in him will never be shamed.

The Old Testament passage about the stone which the builders rejected is this one: **“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is Jehovah’s doing. It is marvelous in our eyes”** (Psalm 118:21-23). Jesus quoted that passage to the chief priests and elders who came to challenge him about his authority (see Matthew 21:42). And Peter quoted it to the rulers of the people and the elders of Israel when he and John had been arrested by them for preaching about Jesus (see Acts 4:11).

The Old Testament passage about a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense is this one: **“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). Paul spoke of that passage in his book to the Romans when he was explaining why the people of Israel had not accepted Christ (see Romans 9:32-33).

In his book to the Ephesians, Paul also told how Jesus is the chief corner of the new holy temple of the Lord, which he also called the household of God: **“... the household of God. Which was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner, in whom the whole building joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together in Spirit into a habitation of God”** (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Notice how Peter said that the rulers of the Jews stumbled at the word because they were set. They stumbled at the word because they had been disobedient, and were being disobedient. That means they were disobedient to the word of God because they were disobedient men. Men who are unrepentant sinners are destined to stumble at the word of God because they are unrepentant sinners. Their disobedience is a vicious cycle for them. It keeps them unable to understand and believe. They can only break out of that cycle when they turn away from evil and repent of their sins.

## A royal priesthood

- **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).

Jehovah wanted to make his people Israel be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For he said about them at mount Sinai after he freed them from Egyptian bondage, **“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”** (Exodus 19:5-6).

The people of Israel failed to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation because they did not obey the voice of Jehovah and keep his covenant. They obeyed some things of it from time to time, but most of the time they did not keep his covenant with them. There-

fore, he has rejected them as his chosen race, and as his royal priesthood, and as his holy nation.

God's holy nation is now the kingdom of the heavens that Jesus established. And now we his disciples are God's chosen race and royal priesthood. Peter also said we were **"a people for an acquired possession."** Jesus bought us with the price of his blood. Remember, Paul spoke of that, when he 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).

God made us a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. He made us that way so that we might broadly proclaim the excellencies of God who called us through his Son Jesus Christ. That was God's plan for Israel, but they failed him. Israel was an earthly nation of an earthly race composed of a people called the Hebrews. The kingdom of the heavens is a spiritual nation of a spiritual race composed of all who believe and obey Jesus Christ. Therefore, it will never fail.

The Hebrews failed not because they were an inferior race, but because they were a worldly race. Every race would have failed because they become members of it by birth and not by the character of their spirit. The kingdom of God will never fail because it is a spiritual race composed of all who believe and obey Jesus Christ

We the disciples of Christ were chosen so that we might broadly proclaim the excellencies of God. And unlike the people of Israel, ever since the beginning the disciples of Christ have been doing that. The books I have written are only a tiny part of the work of broadly proclaiming the excellencies of God. Thousands upon thousands of faithful disciples of Christ have broadly proclaimed, and continue to proclaim the excellencies of God, while the people of Israel as well as the rest of the world continue to deny him.

God called us **"out of darkness into his marvelous light."** That darkness symbolizes our ignorance about God and his will for us. Through his testimony in the Bible we can see his marvelous light, and it is a beautiful and magnificent light. Every man who has ever groped about in the darkness somewhere, and then came into the light, knows what a wonderful blessing light is.

I can testify to you that the light of the word of God far exceeds the magnificence of any physical light. It will literally transform your life, making you much wiser and more righteous. And best of all it will save your soul, qualifying you to become a son of God for eternity in heaven.

## Now a people of God

- **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 2:10).

What Peter meant by "not a people" is unclear. He was not speaking to Gentiles because his book is addressed to Christian Jews of the Dispersion. Nor could he have meant not being a people in the general sense, because every man has some kind of identity that unites him with other men, if only by nationality.

Peter must have meant those Jews were not a people because they were not part of the nation of Israel, being of the Dispersion. They were simply Jews scattered among Gentile nations. Moreover, they were not recognized as a people of God before they became Christians. Remember, the sons of Israel are no longer God's chosen people. They can now only become God's people by identifying and uniting with everybody who believes in Christ, including Gentiles.

Likewise about obtaining mercy, Peter could not have been speaking in a general sense, because we all receive some kinds of mercy regarding various things. He was speaking about the mercy of our spiritual salvation, which is salvation from the condemnation of our sins. And that can only come through our redemption by Christ.

Therefore, those Jews were formerly not recognized as a people of God, nor had they obtained the mercy of spiritual salvation. However, after believing and obeying Christ they became a people of God, and they obtained mercy from him, the salvation of their souls.

## Abstain from the fleshly lusts

- **Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul** (First Peter 2:11-12).

Although those Jews were sojourners of the Dispersion, as disciples of Christ, we are all aliens and sojourners in this world. Remember what the author of Hebrew said about our sojourn here upon the earth. After describing the faith of many men and women of the Bible, he said, **“All these died in faith, not having taken the promises, but who saw and greeted them from afar, and who confessed that they were foreigners and sojourners on the earth. For those who say such things show that they are seeking a fatherland. And if indeed they remembered that from which they came out, they would have had time to return. But now they aspire for a superior one, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”** (Hebrews 11:13-16).

This world is not our home. We are aliens and sojourners here because we are not a part of the world. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“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). We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

Nevertheless, as long as we are in this world we live in a body of flesh. And our body of flesh has lusts that war against our soul. Peter urged us to abstain from those fleshly lusts. Many of those lusts are a result of the natural desires of our body to indulge wrongfully, such as to commit fornication. However, some of them are evil at any level, such as envy and greed.

Because of the sin of Adam we are all born with a corrupted body of flesh that wars against our soul. Indeed, Jehovah said after the great flood, **“... the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth”** (Genesis 8:21). Paul told about his own struggle to subdue and abstain from his fleshly lusts: **“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 9:25-27).

Even our Lord Jesus Christ needed to subdue and abstain from the lusts of his flesh that were warring against his soul. If he had none of those lusts he would not have been tempted as we are. But the author of Hebrews said he was: **"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but who was tempted in all things in the same way, without sin"** (Hebrews 4:15).

## Have good behavior among the Gentiles

- **Having your behavior good among the Gentiles, so that, upon which they speak against you as evildoers, they may glorify God in the day of visitation, from having observed your good works** (First Peter 2:11-12).

We must not only display our good behavior before God and among ourselves, but we must display it among the unbelievers and sinners of the world, whom Peter called Gentiles. Peter knew that some Gentiles were Christians, but he was using the word Gentiles to refer to unbelievers. That was commonly done among the Jews, just as they commonly referred to Gentiles as Greeks. As in this passage: **"Become ye inoffensive both to Jews and to Greeks, and to the church of God ..."** (First Corinthians 10:32).

Unbelievers have always spoken against the disciples of Christ as evildoers. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **"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).

Unbelievers speak against us as evildoers because their eyes have been blinded by the devil. However, in the day of visitation their eyes will be opened. The day of visitation refers to the end of the world and the final judgment of all men. In that day both believers and unbelievers alike will glorify God.

For the book of Revelation quotes the righteous souls in heaven saying, **"Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the nations. Who will, no, not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, because thou alone are holy? Because all the nations will come and worship before thee, because thy righteous deeds were made known"** (Revelation 15:3-4).

Apparently in the day of visitation unbelievers will be allowed to see how we had lived in the world. And with their eyes opened to know the truth they will glorify God because of seeing the good works that we did. They will glorify God because our good works are a result of our faith in him. It is God who makes us righteous. But remember, that happens only when we allow him.

## Submit to human establishments

- **Therefore because of the Lord, ye should submit to every human establishment, whether to a king as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers. Because this way is the will of God, doing good to muzzle the ignorance of the foolish men** (First Peter 2:13-15).

We are disciples of Christ, and what we do reflects upon him. Remember what Paul said about the Jews: **“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). And if we are rebellious against human establishments it will bring reproach upon the Lord.

What Peter meant by every human establishment was every legal authority over us. That includes the chief rulers and the subordinate rulers sent by them, because they are sent **“for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers.”** Those rulers serve God when they do those things. Therefore, we must submit ourselves to them. Only when rulers command sinful things should we refuse them. I speak more about those things in my commentary of the book of Romans (see Rom. 13).

Peter said our submission to every human establishment was the will of God. It is God’s will for us to muzzle the ignorance of foolish men by doing good. And it is doing good in the sight of the Lord to submit to every human establishment that does vengeance against evildoers and praises well-doers.

Our doing good that way will muzzle the ignorance of the foolish men because they will have nothing to accuse us before those rulers. Foolish men who speak against us as evildoers will be silenced when they learn that we are law abiding citizens, submitting to every human establishment. Paul also said, **“Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:21).

Consider the example of our Lord who muzzled the ignorance of his enemies by being a righteous man. When the chief priests and the multitudes brought Jesus before Pilate the governor, Pilate said to them, **“I find nothing guilty in this man”** (Luke 23:4). And remember what Pilate’s wife said to him when he was judging Jesus: **“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 chief priests and the Jewish mob gathered by them were muzzled in their false accusations against Jesus. They only succeeded in having Jesus crucified by threatening to accuse Pilate of tolerating another king besides Caesar. Thus, Jesus was not condemned because he was guilty of anything. He was condemned because he confessed to being King of the Jews, although he explained to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world.

Evil and foolish men continue to contrive ways to persecute us even when we submit to every human establishment. In recent times they have created what they call “hate crime” laws, and “anti-discrimination” laws to condemn us when we oppose sin and wickedness. We are not to obey laws that are against the righteousness that God has commanded us.

## Free but bondmen of God

- **As free, and not having the freedom as a cover-up of evil, but as bondmen of God** (First Peter 2:16).

Although God has commanded us to “**submit to every human establishment**” (those that punish evil and reward righteousness), God has made us free men. As disciples of Christ God does not judge us by a legal system the way he judges other men. Christ freed us from that. 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).

However, Peter warned against using the freedom God has given us as a cover-up of evil. What he means is that our freedom is not a license to sin. We are free only within the limits of that which is good and right and just. And because there are many ways to do those things we have freedom. Nevertheless, there are limits to our freedom.

Therefore, no man can claim the freedom to sin. No man can sin and justify himself by saying he was simply using his God-given freedom. Just because a man can do something, does not mean he has the right to do it any way he chooses. Our freedom is not a license to sin.

God has given us freedom, but we are to use it as his bondmen. We are to use the freedom and resources he has given us to serve him by bearing fruit for righteousness. Remember the parable of the nobleman and his ten bondmen: “**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). We are bondmen of God, and our duty is to “do business” by promoting his truth and righteousness until he returns at the end of the world.

## Respect, love, and fear

- **Respect all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Respect the king** (First Peter 2:17).

Peter here speaks of respect, love, and fear. We are commanded to respect all men including the king. However, respecting all men is not to be taken literally, because there are some men who are so evil they do not deserve our respect. We must show respect to the offices of king and other rulers, but we need not respect every man who holds such offices.

For example, Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee during the time of Jesus, but Jesus had no respect for him. Jesus even called him a fox, as reported in this passage: “**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).

Moreover, Jesus would not even speak to Herod when Pilate the governor sent Jesus to him. For the record says, “**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).

Regarding our love for the brotherhood, the New Testament is filled with commands that we love each other. For example, remember what Jesus said to his apostles at 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).

We should not only love each other as individuals, but we should love the brotherhood. Peter is the only New Testament author that uses the word brotherhood. He used that word to refer to the church. And he probably chose the word brotherhood because it reveals more about the loving camaraderie that is an integral part of Christ’s church.

The command to fear God is found throughout the Bible. We must love God because he is our Creator and our Savior. It is only right and just for us to love him. But we must also fear him because his wrath can be aroused against us when we sin against him. We must both love him and fear him. We love him because he is so worthy of all our love and adoration. And we fear him because of his overwhelming power to punish.

It is healthy for children to both love and fear their parents. The worst of the spoiled brats are children who have no fear of their parents. And men who have no fear of God are the worst of the sinners.

## Household servants

- **Household servants, submitting to the masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the wayward. For this is graciousness, if, because of consciousness of God, any man endures sorrows, suffering wrongfully. For what kind of credit is it, if, sinning and being beaten, ye will endure? But if, doing good and suffering, ye will endure, this is graciousness with God** (First Peter 2:18-20).

Household servants refer to those who are employed by someone else. It does not refer only to those who work in a house. Being a household servant includes doing any kind of work for a man. For example, Jesus said about himself, **“If they have called the house-ruler Beelzebub, how much more those of his household”** (Matthew 10:25). The household of Jesus is composed of his disciples. Therefore, he is the house-ruler, and we are his household servants.

Most of us are employed by someone else, whether by an individual or by an organization. Peter commands us to submit to those who rule over us in our employment. And he says to do it with all fear. That means to have an attitude of aversion to conflicts with them. Peter said we should submit with all fear, even to the wayward. Wayward masters are those who are sinful and harsh, but not criminal. Criminals of any kind should be reported to the proper authorities.

In that passage Peter stated twice what was graciousness with God. Graciousness with him is going good while enduring sorrows and suffering wrongfully because of consciousness

of God. Consciousness of God in that passage refers to being aware that what we do is obedience to him. We do good even when suffering, even when our suffering is unjust.

Notice how Peter said there was no credit to a man if he endures being beaten because of having sinned. It is a reproach to a guilty man if he resists being beaten because of his guilt, but there is no credit to him for enduring. Such men deserve their punishment, and they should accept it without making themselves more guilty by resisting.

Notice also how Peter referred to being beaten because of sin. Corporal punishment has been demonized by this most lawless generation of Americans. But as you can see in that passage, corporal punishment is recognized by the word of God as being completely acceptable. Properly applied corporal punishment, used on both guilty adults and guilty children, is a very effective way to help control wrongdoing, which has greatly multiplied since corporal punishment has been outlawed in America.

### Follow the footsteps of Christ

- **For ye were called for this. Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, so that ye should follow his footsteps. Who did no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth. Who, being reviled, did not revile in return. Suffering, he did not threaten, but yielded to him who judges righteously** (First Peter 2:21-23).

We are not called by God directly, but through the teachings and the preaching of the good news of Christ. And we his disciples were called to do good and endure sorrows, even when suffering wrongfully. Peter told how Christ left us an example, suffering for us, so that we should follow his footsteps. He alone of all men lived without sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth. He always spoke the truth of God. Indeed he told his apostles, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6).

Jesus went about speaking the truth of God and doing good among the people. Yet he was often reviled and falsely accused. Nevertheless, he never reviled in return. To revile is to use abusive and contemptuous language. An example of how the Jews reviled Jesus is found in this passage: **“And many of them said, He has a demon, and is mad. Why do ye listen to him?”** (John 10:20). Jesus rebuked and condemned unrepentant sinners, but he never reviled anyone.

Even during his great suffering after his betrayal, he did not threaten those who were oppressing him unjustly. Christ yielded to God our Father who judges righteously. It was God’s will that Jesus accept his suffering that way. And Christ yielded himself to God’s will for him. He yielded because he knew that God judges righteously. He knew that God would avenge his unjust suffering and would reward his obedience. And God will avenge and reward us as well, if we endure unjust sufferings while doing good, if we follow the footsteps of our Savior.

Nevertheless remember, Paul demanded a public apology from the magistrates at Philippi when they violated Roman law by beating and imprisoning him and Silas without a proper hearing. Those authorities violated Roman law because Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens and were not to be treated that way.

Here is how it happened: **“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).

## Having died to sins

- **Who himself took up our sins in his body upon the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live to the righteousness of him from whose wound ye were healed** (First Peter 2:24).

Jesus took up our sins in his body upon the tree when he was crucified. He did not take our sins literally and make himself guilty. He took up our sins in the sense of qualifying himself to redeem us of our sins. By his earthly life of perfect obedience to God, even to being crucified, God rewarded him with the right to redeem all who belong to him. His crucifixion was the climax of his perfect obedience.

Hence, he paid for our sins by taking them up in his body upon the tree. He paid our debt to God by purchasing us. That was part of God’s reward for his perfect obedience: the right to redeem us from our sins. Remember what Paul said about our being bought: **“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).

Remember however, Christ did not redeem all men. His redemption applies only to those who belong to him. And in order for us to belong to him we must die to our sins and live to his righteousness. We die by repenting of our sins and being immersed in a watery grave for the remission of them. We rise from that immersion to live to the righteousness of Christ, because it was from his wound that we were healed. It was from his suffering and death, in perfect obedience to God, that earned him the right to heal our souls for eternal salvation.

## Straying sheep returned

- **For ye were like sheep going astray, but now were returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls** (First Peter 2:25).

Jesus referred to himself as our Shepherd and to us as his sheep in this passage: **“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).

All men are born into the world with a pure spirit but a corrupted body. Being ignorant and weak all men (except for the Son of God) eventually sin and go astray from the pure ways of God. We who are the sheep of Jesus are those who love truth and righteousness, who are humble and lowly, and who are open-minded and eager to learn. And when we hear his words we are attracted to him, thereby returning to him as the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

Those who are not the sheep of Jesus harden their hearts, and let their pride and love for this sinful world keep them from him. As Jesus said to the Jews who were denying 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”** (John 10:26-27).

Jesus is the great Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. Remember, Jesus, with God the Father, created the world and everything in it. And we were created in the image of God so that we could become sons of God for eternity in heaven. Therefore, Jesus is our great Shepherd. He is also the Guardian of our souls because the devil seeks to destroy us.

Remember, Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament (see First Corinthians 10:4). Therefore, hearken to the words of this psalm: **“O come, let us sing to Jehovah. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to him with psalms. For Jehovah is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth. The heights of the mountains are also his. The sea is his, and he made it. And his hands formed the dry land.**

**“O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before Jehovah our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, O that ye would hear his voice! Harden not your heart ...”** (Psalm 95:1-8).

## Wives be subordinate to their husbands

- **Likewise the wives, being subordinate to their own husbands, so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they will be gained without a word by the behavior of the wives, observing, in fear, your pure behavior** (First Peter 3:1-2).

From the beginning, throughout the Bible wives are commanded to be subordinate to their own husbands. Remember what God said to Eve: **“And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee”** (Genesis 3:16).

Peter mentions a valuable effect of a Christian wife being subordinate to her husband. He no doubt mentions that effect because, as with men, women have always resisted obeying the commands of God. And that means women commonly fail to be properly subordinate to their husbands.

Therefore, when a Christian woman is properly subordinate to her husband it greatly impresses him. Especially since women tend to use many words to persuade their hus-

bands, often to the point of nagging. Too often such efforts either cause him to be alienated to her or they provoke a quarrel.

When Peter spoke of a man observing in fear his wife's pure behavior, he was using the word fear in the sense of awe. A subordinate wife who lives a clean and wholesome life is truly an awesome sight in the eyes of her husband, even one who is disobedient to the word of God. And unless the man's heart is completely hardened, he can be won over to Christ by the powerful influence of her quiet obedience—to him and to Christ.

## The meek and quiet spirit

- **Of which let it not be the outward world of braiding of hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel, but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible, of the meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God** (First Peter 3:3-4).

Peter is not condemning the braiding of hair or the wearing of gold, any more than he is condemning the putting on of apparel. He is condemning the excessive emphasis on outward appearance. It is natural for a woman to want to look pretty, but that desire sometimes leads to excess. And it is the emphasis on outward appearance to the neglect of the inner character that Peter is condemning.

A modern example of what Peter condemned is the use of high-heeled shoes by women, sometimes to ridiculous extremes. Physicians agree that they are harmful to a woman's feet, but many women wear them anyway because of their perverted desire to look as tall as men. The excuse given for wearing them is that it makes their legs look more beautiful. That is deceitful nonsense. The purpose is to pander to their vanity by making them look taller. I have no doubt Peter would also have condemned such vanity in Christian women.

In God's sight, the most beautiful thing about a woman is her meek and quiet spirit, which we call femininity. That is her hidden man of the heart, which unlike our body of flesh is incorruptible. It is incorruptible because the character of our spirit is what qualifies us to become sons of God for eternity in heaven. And our spirit is the only thing we take with us when this life is over, because it is our eternal identity.

Peter said that a meek and quiet spirit in a woman is very precious in the sight of God. That characteristic of a woman is vital because of the role God has given women. God has commanded women to be subordinate to men. And meekness and quietness are important parts of subordination.

Boldness and outspokenness are masculine characteristics. And they are good when properly applied. Peter was often bold and outspoken for Christ, and he was given the keys of the kingdom because of it (see Matthew 16:15-19). However, being bold and outspoken is unbecoming of a Christian woman (although not completely forbidden).

Wives, if you want your husband to look upon you with awe and be greatly influenced by you, then do not nag, but be subordinate to him with a meek and quiet spirit, and always live righteously in the sight of God.

## Sarah called Abraham her Lord

- **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).

The holy women of the Old Testament trusted God and adorned themselves with a meek and quiet spirit. And they were subordinate to their own husbands. Peter gave the example of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. She obeyed him, and even called him lord. Calling people lord was commonly done during Bible times, usually the way we now call men “sir,” which is a respectful term of address.

However, using the word lord in America now almost always refers to God. Hence, if a modern American woman called her husband lord, it would be interpreted as calling him God. For that reason it would not be good to apply literally what Peter said about calling a husband lord. The proper term to address a man with respect is now the word “sir.”

We should accept conventional uses when otherwise would only cause unnecessary trouble. Even Jesus conformed that way, because he did not use the name Jehovah when referring to God. You will not find the word Jehovah in the New Testament because the Jews in their foolish and excessive zeal had outlawed using it. The reason given was to avoid taking the name of God in vain. Hence, they outlawed using his name at all. Even now they will not even spell the word God properly, but spell it G\_d.

For that reason neither Christ nor his disciples used the word Jehovah. They conformed to that foolish convention to prevent unnecessary conflicts. Remember this example of Jesus not wanting to offend unnecessarily: **“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).

Therefore, it is now more appropriate to use the word sir instead of the word lord when referring to anyone except God. The proper way now for a wife to call her husband is sir when she wants to show her subordination to him. Nevertheless, be not legalistic and think a woman must always address her husband that way.

As we become children of Abraham in spirit when we trust and obey God, so also women become children of Sarah when they trust God, address their husbands respectfully, are subordinate and obedient to them, and live pure and wholesome lives.

Peter also said the women should not be afraid of anything fearful. Being the weaker sex and being more vulnerable, women naturally tend to be more fearful than men about many things. However, Christian women need to suppress that natural feeling, and rely upon the

care of God. Trusting God and living righteously gives us all more confidence in the face of fearful things.

What Peter said does not mean that a woman should never be afraid. There are occasional situations when it is right for both men and women to be afraid. Peter seems to have been referring to having the trust and confidence in God to not dread facing the stresses and tribulations of this life.

## Husbands toward their wives

- **Likewise the husbands living together knowledgeably, as with a weaker vessel, apportioning worth to the female as also joint-heirs of the grace of life, for your prayers not to be hindered** (First Peter 3:7).

God created women as a weaker vessel. The Bible sometimes refers to people as vessels, because vessels are useful utensils. Consider these words of Paul: **“If therefore any man purges himself from these things, he will be a vessel for esteem, sanctified and useful to the master, prepared for every good work”** (Second Timothy 2:21).

Peter referred to wives as a weaker vessel in the marriage relationship. But women are weaker in many ways. They are weaker in their physical nature. They are smaller in stature; they are weaker in strength; they have softer and more frail bodies. They are also weaker in their psychological nature. Therefore they are both physically and emotionally more vulnerable. However, being that way wives are much better equipped both physically and emotionally to be obedient wives and to rear young children, which is their God given role in life.

Hence, it is important for husbands to live together knowledgeably with their wives. They should recognize and acknowledge them as a weaker vessel, and not expect them to be able to do everything that men can do.

Certainly, it is important for a husband to expressing his feelings and emotions toward his wife. However, even then his interactions with her should be with knowledge and intelligence. The husband is to be the head of the wife, and he has the responsibility of guiding and managing her and their children. Therefore, he should live together with her knowledgeably. Fools live by their emotions. And marriages driven only by emotions invariably become full of conflict, strife, and disorder.

This corrupt generation of Americans does everything they can to deny the weaker nature of women. As a result our rulers have given them equal rights, thus robbing husbands of their right as head of the wife. Consequently, fewer men and women want to marry, and the country is being filled with bastards and homosexuals. And our sinful rulers are too blind (and cowardly) to see the destructiveness of it.

However, as children of God we must live according to his will. He created us, and he knows what is best for us. Therefore, wives must be subservient to their own husbands. And husbands must live together with them knowledgeably, as with a weaker vessel. Husbands must recognize and accommodate for the various weaknesses of their wives. And a man who truly loves his wife will indeed want to do that.

Moreover, we must apportion worth to the female as also joint-heirs of the grace of life. Although women are to be subservient to men in this life, they are equal in being heirs of the grace of life. They are equal in having the hope of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven. In God's sight men and women are equally valuable. Therefore, we must give them that equality. We must apportion worth to them as being equal heirs of God's grace of eternal life that comes through Christ.

It is important for us as men to apportion that worth to them so that our prayers will not be hindered. Our prayers to God will not be as effective before him unless we apportion them that worth. God will not apportion worth to us if we do not apportion equal worth to women as joint-heirs of the grace of life.

## Love each other

- **And finally, all be like-minded, sympathetic, brother-loving, compassionate, friendly, not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but instead giving praise, knowing that ye were called for this, so that ye might inherit a blessing** (First Peter 3:8-9).

After giving many instructions about various things, Peter said "And finally"; then he listed eight other things we should be and should do:

be like-minded  
 sympathetic  
 brother-loving  
 compassionate  
 friendly  
 not rendering evil for evil  
 or reviling for reviling  
 but instead giving praise

Being like-minded means thinking the same way about the spiritual things of life, such as our faith in Christ and our commitment to obey him. It also means we should agree about what the word of God says for us. That is probably the most divisive thing about those who believe in Christ. It is where we are the least like-minded. And the reason is because most people who claim to believe in him do not want to accept everything that the Bible teaches. The simple command to be immersed in water for the remission of sins is one common example.

Being sympathetic means to share the feelings of someone else. For example, as Paul said, we should "**Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep ...**" (Romans 12:15). We should especially sympathize with our brothers and sisters during their times of sorrow, because we are all members of the body of Christ. As Paul said about our communal body, "**And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer together, or one part is honored, all the parts rejoice together**" (First Corinthians 12:26).

We should also be brother-loving because we are all spiritual brothers, being members of the body of Christ. Remember, when Jesus said, "**Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself**" (Matthew 22:39), he was not commanding us to love every neighbor of ours equally with everyone else. It is right for us to love our wives and children more than other men's

wives and children. And it is right for us to be brother-loving among those who belong to Christ with us.

Compassion is having strong feelings of sympathy and pity toward others. Christ was very compassionate during his life on the earth. Remember for example, this passage about him: **“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). Therefore we should be compassionate toward those who are suffering and in need—those who are worthy of it.

We should also be friendly, not only toward each other, but also toward outsiders. We should not be aloof, clannish, or reclusive. A major duty we have toward Christ is to do what we can to bring new souls into his kingdom. And being unfriendly is a major obstacle to that effort. People vary in their personalities so that some are much more socially inclined. Nevertheless, we can all be friendly regardless of how reserved may be our disposition.

As disciples of Christ we should also not render evil for evil. Although it is natural for us to want to repay evil for evil, we should resist and wait for God. Remember what Paul said about it: **“Become not wise according to yourselves, rendering to no man evil for evil, premeditating things right in the sight of all men. 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. Be thou not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”** (Romans 12:16-21).

To revile is to use abusive and contemptuous language. As Christians we should never revile anyone, even when they revile us. Remember what Peter said about Christ being reviled: **“Who, being reviled, did not revile in return. Suffering, he did not threaten, but yielded to him who judges righteously”** (First Peter 2:23).

Instead of rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling we should give praise. That means we should look for things to compliment people about, those worthy of it. We should focus on the positive and the uplifting, not on the negative and destructive. When we give praise (for worthy things) we are encouraging people. We are strengthening our relationships with them. And that is helpful for them and for us. Nevertheless, we should never use flattery. For Solomon said, **“A lying tongue hates those whom it has wounded, and a flattering mouth works ruin”** (Proverbs 26:28). Flattery is deceitful.

After mentioning those things, Peter said we should recognize (know) that we were called for them. That means God has invited us to become disciples of his Christ and members of his kingdom so that we can do those things and live that way. And thereby we inherit a blessing from him, the greatest of which is to become his sons for eternity in heaven.

Our living the way Peter described and commanded will produce many different kind of blessings from God. Remember these words of Solomon: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). And even when we suffer

because of righteousness, remember that God has guaranteed the great blessing of life for us in the new Jerusalem of heaven with him when this world is over.

## To love life and see good days

- **For he who wants to love life, and see good days, let him restrain his tongue from evil, and his lips not to speak deceit. Let him turn away from evil, and do good. Let him seek peace, and pursue it** (First Peter 3:10-11).

Those words are from a psalm of the Old Testament: **“What man is he who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace, and pursue it”** (Psalm 34:12-14).

Although the wording is slightly different, remember, the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language, while the New Testament was written in the Greek language. And what is written here is a translation into the English language.

That saying from the psalm is very similar to the one from Solomon about righteousness exalting a nation. However, the words of that psalm are more about individuals than nations. Those words teach us that the way for a man to desire life, love many days, and see good is

to restrain his tongue from evil  
to restrain his lips not to speak deceit  
to turn away from evil  
to do good  
to seek peace and pursue it.

Not doing those things will lead to death. That is why Peter said if a man desires life he should do them. Also, doing those things will give a man a longer life. Doing those things will keep a man from harm and will extend his life. Moreover, Peter said that doing those things will bring him good. That simple formula should be kept in mind by everyone, because it is such a good summary of how we should live wisely in this world.

Nevertheless remember, this is a world of vanity, and even righteous men are vulnerable to its injustice. As Solomon said, **“There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity”** (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

The first two of those virtues that Peter listed are about restraining our tongue. Remember how James spoke of the destructive power of the tongue: **“So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly. Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. 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 3:5-6).

The tongue is the primary organ we use to communicate with people. We communicate with them to share information and to influence their behavior. Communicating falsely is called deceit, and deceit is one of the most destructive acts of the tongue. Deceit has caused immeasurable misery, destruction, and death.

Deceit is a major way the devil leads people astray. For example, by tempting Eve and deceiving her the devil caused her to sin against God. That led her to tempt Adam causing him to sin. And the result was a lifetime of sorrow for all of us, ending in death. That deception also caused some punishment for the devil, but he accepted it because his deceit resulted in the alienation of all mankind from God, which caused the loss or our opportunity to become sons of God in heaven. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Deceit is a device of the devil and all who follow him. Remember what Jesus said to the Jews who apposed him: **“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 8:44).

Therefore, restrain your lips not to speak deceit. Your lips need to be restrained because it is often tempting to speak deceit. It is tempting because like other sins deceit can be very rewarding. However, the rewards of deceit are themselves deceptive, because deceit eventually brings evil days, evil things, and even death. Deceit is like taking pleasure-inducing drugs, which destroy the lives of those who use them.

There are many ways that the tongue can do evil besides speaking deceit. Examples are things like speaking gossip, uttering vulgarities, revealing secrets, speaking rashly and impulsively, speaking foolishly, alienating people by talking too much. He who would desire life, love many days, and see good, must therefore restrain his tongue from evil.

Peter also said to turn away from evil. There are many ways to do evil besides with the tongue. Evil is doing things that are harmful and destructive. As children of God we should turn away from evil. God is the great Creator of good things, and as his children we should create good things, not evil things. Evil should only be applied against evil people, and that should only be done by the proper authorities.

There are also many ways to do good. Just as it is impossible for us to list all the ways to do evil, so also it is impossible to list all the ways to do good, because new ways of doing good and evil are continually being created. As disciples of Christ we must be known for doing good. That is what our Savior did while he lived in this world. Everywhere he went he did good, whether it was in teaching his good news of our salvation or whether it was in healing the sick.

Finally, Peter said the man who wants to desire life, love many days, and see good was to seek peace and pursue it. Remember the blessing that Jesus gave to those who seek peace and pursue it: **“Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God”** (Matthew 5:9).

The only time we should be against peace is in our war against sin and wickedness. Yet even then the ultimate goal is peace. For when sin and wickedness are defeated, that brings genuine peace. It brings the kind of peace that enables people to use their freedom and resources to be creative and constructive. Therefore, seek peace, and pursue it even when you are fighting against sin and wickedness. That is what America was doing during the second world war. Our political rulers falsely claimed we were fighting for freedom and democracy, but we were actually fighting for truth and righteousness.

## The Lord sees and hears the righteous

- **Because the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears to their supplication, but the face of the Lord is against men who do evil things** (First Peter 3:12).

Doing those righteous things will result in those blessings because **“the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears to their supplication.”** His eyes are toward us because he loves righteousness and justice, as the psalmist said: **“For the word of Jehovah is right, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the loving kindness of Jehovah”** (Psalm 33:4-5).

His eyes are toward us because he loves us. Therefore his ears are to our supplication. That means when we pray to him, making requests of him, he hears us. And he not only hears us, but he hearkens to us and blesses us with good things. For he is our heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. And just as every righteous father loves his children and does good things for them, so God loves us and does good things for us.

In contrast, **“the face of the Lord is against men who do evil things.”** How God opposes those who do evil things varies depending upon many circumstances. Nevertheless, whether he does it sooner or later he always punishes them. And their punishment also depends upon many things. Solomon wrote much about the punishment of those who do evil, which I analyze in my book *King Solomon’s advice for the world*.

Here are just a few things Solomon said about them:

**Hand in hand, the evil man shall not be unpunished, but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered** (Proverbs 11:21).

**A good man shall obtain favor of Jehovah, but he will condemn a man of wicked devices. A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved** (Proverbs 12:2-3)

**Fret not thyself because of evildoers, nor be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man. The lamp of the wicked shall be put out** (Proverbs 24:19-20).

## Become imitators of the good

- **And who is he who will harm you, if ye become imitators of the good? But even if ye should suffer because of righteousness, ye are blessed. But do not fear their terror nor be shaken, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts** (First Peter 3:13-15).

Although God is currently allowing sin against him, he retains the ultimate control of all things, and will always retain it. And since we belong to him as his children, then who is he who will harm us? There is no power on the earth or in heaven that can harm us (our divine and eternal spirit)—if we become imitators of the good. To imitate means to do the same thing. God always does the good, and we must imitate him if we want his protection from harm. Jesus gave us the perfect example in his own life of how we are to imitate the good.

God will let nothing harm our eternal spirit. However, he does sometimes allow our bodies to be harmed, even when we try to live right. Nevertheless, as Peter said, we are blessed even if we should suffer because of righteousness.

Remember the blessing Jesus gave to those who were persecuted because of 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).

Therefore, we should not fear the terror of those who cause us to suffer because of righteousness. Nor should we be shaken by them. Instead, we should sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.

The terror of wicked men can sometimes be severe. Modern examples are the vicious actions of some Muslims against us. Nevertheless, Peter said we should not fear their terror not be shaken. To be shaken means to be disturbed. Certainly their terror can shake our bodies, but we should not allow our spirits to be shaken. We must continually rely upon our faith and trust in God regardless of what they do to us, knowing that we are blessed by him.

Moreover, we should sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. Remember, to sanctify means to set apart as holy. During the time of the last supper with his apostles, Jesus prayed that God would sanctify them: **“They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is truth”** (John 17:16-17).

We cannot sanctify God because he is already sanctified. There is no one who is more holy than God our heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ. However, Peter said we should sanctify him in our hearts. That means in our deepest thoughts and feelings about God he should be set apart as holy to us.

We should never associate God with anything unclean in our thoughts and feelings. We should never accuse him of anything because he never does anything wrong. We should never be angry with him about anything because he never deserves it. We should never doubt him because he is always trustworthy. We should always think of him as pure and holy, and perfect in every way, because that is how he truly is. Therefore, we should always sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.

## Always be ready to defend your hope

- **And always be ready for a defense to every man who asks you a word about the hope in you, with meekness and fear** (First Peter 3:15).

That is just one more reason we need to continually study the Bible. From time to time unbelievers are going to ask us about the hope we have in us, which is to become sons of God for eternity. Therefore, we need to be well prepared to defend that hope we have in us.

The scoffers of the world think that our faith is purely emotional and non-intellectual. They are ignorant liars. For Peter commanded us to be ready to defend the hope we have

in us. And such a hope can only be defended rationally and intellectually. Blind faith and hope cannot be defended because it is not rational.

Peter also said we should always be ready for that defense with meekness and fear. It seems to be natural to become aggressive when making a defense about something. That is why such defenses often become emotional arguments. Peter warned against that. Be prepared to make a defense with meekness. Never allow the defense of the hope you have in you to make you aggressive and contentious.

Not only should we always be ready for that defense with meekness, but also with fear. However, that fear should not be the kind that works against us, causing trembling and the desire to flee. The fear we should have is that we will not be ready for our defense. That kind of fear motivates us to prepare well. It energizes us to work harder to be prepared. That kind of fear helps us to be positive instead of wanting to flee.

## Have a good conscience

- **Having a good conscience, so that, in what they speak against you as of evildoers, they may be ashamed, those who revile your good behavior in Christ** (First Peter 3:16).

There are many enemies of Christ and his church who follow the devil and falsely accuse us. The chief priests and the Pharisees called Jesus a deceiver (see Matthew 27:63). The Pharisees even accused him of being in league with the devil, because they said about him, **“This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons”** (Matthew 12:24).

Jesus warned his disciples that the world would hate them: **“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. 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”** (John 15:18-20).

Genuine Christians have always been persecuted and falsely accused. The New Testament gives many examples of such persecution during the time of the early church. Such persecution and false accusations have cycled throughout the centuries from mild to severe. The persecutions and false accusations against Christians have increased in America since the country chose to become pagan. Indeed, throughout the world there is no religion that is persecuted more than the authentic religion of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, the time will come when those who persecute us and accuse us falsely will be ashamed. They will be ashamed on the day of judgment, because then they will learn the truth about our good behavior in Christ. That is why we must always have a good conscience. Otherwise, their evil speaking against us would be justified. If we keep a good conscience their having spoken against us as evildoers will only make them ashamed.

## It is better to suffer doing good

- **For it is better to suffer doing good, if the will of God desires, than for doing evil. Because Christ also once suffered for sins, a righteous man for unrighteous men, so that he might bring you to God** (First Peter 3:17-18).

Remember, when we allow God to rule our lives there is a blessing even when we suffer doing good. No man ever suffered more by doing good than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He accepted his suffering because it was the will of God for him. It was because he accepted his unjust suffering that he earned the right to redeem our souls and reconcile us to God.

And although we sometimes deserve our suffering, God will bless us if we follow his Son Jesus Christ and accept unjust suffering when it is according to his will. Remember what Peter said about enduring suffering: **“For what kind of credit is it, if, sinning and being beaten, ye will endure? But if, doing good and suffering, ye will endure, this is graciousness with God. For ye were called for this. Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, so that ye should follow his footsteps”** (First Peter 2:20-21).

Nevertheless, that does not mean we should be pacifists. We should always resist and oppose unjust suffering, whether it is against us or someone else, unless (like Jesus and his crucifixion) we have no choice. Unjust suffering is evil. Cowards and those deceived by the devil are those who will not resist evil if and when they are able.

## Killed in flesh, made alive in spirit

- **Having indeed been killed in flesh, but made alive in spirit** (First Peter 3:18).

Jesus was indeed killed in his flesh but his eternal spirit never died. It was after he was killed, at his resurrection that God made his flesh alive in spirit. That means although his flesh was dead it was made alive, not in a biological sense, but in being given an animating spirit. The body of Jesus was not itself made alive.

Remember the major wound he was given by the soldier to insure he was dead: **“But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and straightaway blood and water came out”** (John 19:34). Then after his resurrection Jesus said to Thomas who doubted his resurrection: **“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).

If the body of Jesus had been made alive with its normal biological functioning, his heart would have been pumping blood. That means the sword wound could not have remained open. Otherwise he would have continued to shed blood. Therefore, Thomas could not have placed his hand in the side of Jesus.

The fact that Thomas was able to place his hand in the side of Jesus made the resurrection of his body all the more miraculous and astonishing.

## Sinners of the antediluvian world

- **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 3:19-20).

As Jesus had prophesied, his body remained in the sepulcher three days and three nights, but his spirit was not there. Remember what happened when Jesus died: **“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”** (Luke 23:46).

Remember, Jesus (including his body of flesh) did not ascend into heaven until forty days after his resurrection. Jesus went to both paradise and to Hades during those forty days. Regarding his going to paradise, remember what Jesus said to one of the men being crucified with him: **“Truly I say to thee, today thou will be with me in the paradise”** (Luke 23:43). He said those words after the man defended Jesus and showed his faith in him. He and the man were in the paradise that day, but neither of their bodies were in the paradise.

Regarding Hades, in one of Peter’s sermons he quoted the sixteenth Psalm that told how Christ had gone to Hades after his death: **“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”** (Acts 2:29-31).

Hence, those spirits in prison that Peter spoke about were probably in Hades, which is a mysterious temporary abode of the dead. (The King James Version mistranslates Hades to Hell.) Apparently after death the spirits of some souls will be kept in Hades and some will be kept in paradise until the great day of judgment.

Those spirits in prison (the prison of Hades) that Peter mentioned were of men who had been disobedient during the time of the antediluvian world. Remember what the scriptures say about that world: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart.**

**“And Jehovah said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground, from man, to beast, to creeping things, and birds of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah”** (Genesis 6:5-8).

What Jesus preached to them is not told. However, when he was upon the earth Jesus preached repentance of sins. And that must have been what he preached to those spirits who were disobedient formerly during the time of the antediluvian world. Some of them in Hades must have been receptive to repentance.

However, there are some spirits who have so corrupted themselves that they hate God and refuse to repent. Here are two passages about unclean spirits that wanted nothing to do

with Jesus: **“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. 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 8:28-29), and, **“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”** (Mark 1:23-24).

However, the fact that Jesus preached to those spirits in the prison of Hades indicates there was hope that some of them would repent. Nevertheless, if some of them did repent, they would certainly not have escaped their punishment any more than the rich man in the parable of Lazarus was able to escape his punishment when he repented.

In Hades the rich man first asked for a little relief. Then he asked that his brothers be warned to repent. Here is the story: **“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.**

**“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. 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 16:22-31).

The issue of punishment and repentance in the afterlife is too complicated to discuss here. I speak much more about it, and make many conjectures about its mysteries in the appendix to my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Peter mentions the longsuffering of God while he was waiting for Noah to prepare an ark in which he, his wife, his three sons, and their wives were saved through water. Remember what Paul said about the longsuffering of God: **“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).

People do not think of God as ever suffering. However, longsuffering means suffering long. And God does patiently suffer long while he is waiting for men to repent and be rec-

onciled to him through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. He also suffered long while waiting for Noah to complete the ark. It was the sinfulness of that generation that caused God to suffer long.

Here is what the Bible says about how God suffered because of that evil generation: **“And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And Jehovah regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him in his heart”** (Genesis 6:5-6). Having regrets about something, and grieving in the heart about it are certainly forms of suffering.

Notice how Peter said Noah and his family were saved through water. Instead of the water destroying them with that evil generation, the water saved them. That suggests to me that Noah had been subjected to persecution and threats by that evil generation. The water saved Noah from that danger.

In his second letter Peter called Noah a **“a herald of righteousness”** (Second Peter 2:5). A herald is a man who announces news. A herald is also sometimes a harbinger. And that is what Noah probably was. He announced to the world that God was going to bring a great flood against them. Actually, even if he did not say a word, the fact of his constructing such a huge ship on the land was such a proclamation.

And apparently that generation was so evil that they resented the warning he was giving them. The corrupt Hebrews commonly resented the warnings of the prophets of God who urged them to repent. And they often persecuted those prophets, sometimes even to the point of death.

Jesus spoke of that when he was rebuking the Jewish lawyers, saying to them, **“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. 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.**

**“Because of this also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles. 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 11:47-51).

That is probably why Peter said that Noah and his family were saved through water. The flood saved them from that evil generation.

## Immersion now saves us

- **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, who is at the right hand of God, having gone**

**into heaven, agents, and positions of authority, and powers having been subordinated to him** (First Peter 3:21-22).

One of the last things Jesus said to his apostles after his resurrection was, **“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). The immersion Jesus commanded is in water for the remission of sins. That is why Peter said our immersion was a counterpart of Noah’s salvation by water.

Our immersion in water is not for the putting away of filth of the flesh. It is **“an appeal of a good conscience toward God.”** That means by submitting ourselves to immersion in water we are calling upon God to accept our repentance. For it is only through repentance that we can have our conscience cleansed. (Remember however, genuine repentance involves not only being sorry for transgressions, but also doing whatever we can to make recompense for them, and accepting whatever punishment we deserve.)

Immersion saves us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was because of his pure and sacrificial life upon the earth that God gave him the right to redeem our souls. Therefore, after his life upon the earth God resurrected him to heaven and seated him at the right hand of God.

Having proven his complete moral and spiritual superiority, God also gave him authority over the agents of heaven, as well as every position of authority and power, both in heaven and upon the earth. They have all been subordinated to him because he proved his worthiness. No creature, including the devil, can now challenge his worthiness to be **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14).

## Christ suffered in flesh for us

- **Therefore of Christ having suffered in flesh for us, arm ye yourselves also with the same mentality, because he who has suffered in flesh has ceased from sin, in order to live the remaining time in flesh, no longer by lusts of men, but by the will of God** (First Peter 4:1-2).

Christ willingly suffered in his body of flesh in this world so that he could become our Redeemer and save our souls. Therefore, if we want to be his disciples we must arm ourselves with the same mentality. That means we too must be willing to suffer in our bodies of flesh for the sake of our salvation.

Remember what 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 16:14-25). And that means forsaking a worldly life with its fleshly lusts and pleasures. It means making sacrifices, laboring for God and his righteousness, and accepting the persecutions of the world forced upon us.

Peter said that **“he who has suffered in flesh has ceased from sin.”** Suffering in flesh is denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus. It is losing our life, figura-

tively by forsaking the sinful ways of the world for the cause of Christ. By suffering that way we will cease from sin, and will live righteously according to the will of God.

Paul spoke similarly, when he said, **“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”** (Romans 6:6-7).

## The will of the Gentiles

- **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** (First Peter 4:3).

Peter wrote this book to **“the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion.”** That means they were descendants of Hebrews who had been scattered to live in Gentile lands by those who had conquered Israel in centuries past. Having settled in various Gentiles nations those Hebrews had been living the way Gentiles lived.

The bad part about that is they also indulged in the sinful behavior of the Gentiles, just as modern Jews do today. Peter is here admonishing those Christians to put that kind of living behind them. They should no longer want to live the sinful way the Gentiles like to live. Peter is referring to the mass of unbelieving Gentiles.

Peter then listed examples of **“the will of the Gentiles”** that he told them to forsake. Which things include

- debaucheries
- lusts
- excesses of wine
- revelings
- drinking parties
- lawless idolatries

Debaucheries are excess indulgences of sensual pleasures. They include things like wild music and dancing, gluttony, and sexual orgies. Lusts refer to sinful desires of the flesh. We all have body needs, but lust is the desire to indulge them sinfully.

Excesses of wine refer to drunkenness. It also includes using drugs for pleasure. Such excesses are always destructive. Revelings involve boisterous merrymaking. Drinking parties involve excesses of wine (and other alcoholic beverages) in a social gathering. Idolatries include worship or excess devotion to some persons or things, as well as to idols themselves.

All of those things are condemned by God because they are all destructive. Those things cloud people’s minds such that they are led by their blind emotions. Such things have always been associated with barbarism, because the practice of them leads to barbarism. Yet the sensual pleasures gained from doing them blind people into justifying them. They think they are fun and harmless, but they inevitably lead to harm and spiritual degeneracy.

My wife told me what a woman once said to her about drinking parties. The woman mentioned a time when she and her husband went to such a party, but for some reason they were unable to join in the drinking. The woman said that after a while she was astonished

at how foolishly the people began acting. She was astonished because previously when she had joined in the drinking she thought they were all being so clever and witty. Her mind had been clouded with them, preventing her from seeing the truth.

## Thinking it strange of us

- **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 4:4-5).

Since the sinners of the world love those kinds of debaucheries they think it is unnatural not to love them. They think it is strange and perverse when Christians reject that kind of life. And as a result they slander us (commonly done through gossip), accusing us of things like being fanatics and extremists.

Nevertheless as Peter says, those Gentiles will give back an account to God of how they had lived, because he **“fares readily to judge the living and the dead.”** Faring readily means being fully capable, fully prepared, and immediately available to judge both the living and the dead.

And unrepentant sinners who pour out their debaucheries are judged both in this life and in the life to come. They are judged and give an accounting in this life by suffering the evil consequences of their degenerate behavior. And they will be judged and will give an accounting in the afterlife by suffering the punishment of hell.

## Preached to the dead

- **For good news was preached even to the dead for this, so that they might indeed be judged according to men in flesh, but live according to God in spirit** (First Peter 4:6).

Regarding Peter’s words about preaching to the dead, remember this passage: **“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 8:21-22). Obviously the Lord was referring to the spiritually dead burying their own dead. They were spiritually dead because they were not of his disciples.

Remember also what Paul said about self-indulgent widows being dead: **“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). The self-indulgent widow is spiritually dead. Hence, those who are self-indulgent, living in debaucheries, are considered dead in the sight of God.

The good news of Christ was preached even to self-indulgent sinners, **“to the dead.”** It was preached to them **“so that they might indeed be judged according to men in flesh, but live according to God in spirit.”** Being judged according to men in flesh means that self-indulgent sinners who repent and follow Christ will still suffer in their bodies from the consequences of their past debaucheries.

Consider the example of the man we call the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32). He repented of squandering away his inheritance on debaucheries, and he returned to his father to begged his forgiveness. His father received him back joyfully. However, the inheritance of the prodigal son remained lost. He could still work to build his own finances, but he could not get another inheritance from his father, at least not like he had originally.

And so it is with self-indulgent sinners. They will indeed still be judged according to men in flesh, suffering the consequences of their debaucheries. A classic example is the habitual drunkard or drug-addict whose health has permanently suffered because of it.

Nevertheless, when they repent and become disciples of Christ they can live according to God in spirit. That means God will receive them as his children the same way the father of the prodigal son received him. God will receive him that way if he lives according to God in spirit. The good news of Christ says that if a sinner forsakes all of his sins, believes and obeys Jesus, doing righteousness and bearing good fruit for God, then his sins will be forgiven and he will be accepted in the kingdom of God. And that offer is even to the dead, meaning to self-indulgent sinners as well.

## Be serious and sober

- **But the end of all things has approached. Therefore be serious, and be sober for the prayers** (First Peter 4:7).

When Peter said “**the end of all things has approached**” he did not mean the end of the world. He was probably referring either to Christ having come, because he is the climax of God’s will for us, or Peter was referring to the end of each of our lives, because for each of us as we age, the end of all things for us in this world is approaching nearer.

Nevertheless, whatever Peter meant, we should “**be serious, and be sober for the prayers.**” We should be very careful to prepare for the end of our lives. Jesus warned many times about being prepared for the end. We should also be sober for the prayers. God does not hearken to the prayers of those who are self-indulgent. If we want to have hope in Christ to be sons of God for eternity, then we must always be sober, and pray to our heavenly Father often.

## Have fervent love for yourselves

- **And above all having fervent love for yourselves, because love will cover a multitude of sins, stranger-loving toward each other without complaints** (First Peter 4:8-9).

Love for each other must be a predominant characteristic of the disciples of Christ. At the last supper with his apostles, Jesus emphasized love for each other. For example, he said, “**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).

Peter also said that our love for each other should be fervent. Fervent means ardent and intense. It means we should have strong and vigorous love for each other. And our love for

each other must be open and obvious, because remember, Solomon said, **“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden”** (Proverbs 27:5).

Peter also said we should have fervent love for each other, **“because love will cover a multitude of sins.”** James also spoke of covering a multitude of sins, when he said, **“Brothers, if any man among you may be led astray from the truth, and some man converts him, let him know that he who converts a sinful man from his wandering way, will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins”** (James 5:19-20).

Covering a multitude of sins means to prevent them from happening, and Peter said love will do it. Hate is a major characteristic of sinners, as Paul said: **“For we also were formerly foolish, disobedient, being led astray, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in evil and envy, hateful, hating each other”** (Titus 3:3). When we believe and obeying Christ, then the love of God, and our love for him and each other will cover a multitude of sins. Our love for God and each other will prevent them from happening.

Peter also mentioned being stranger-loving toward each other. God has always wanted us to love strangers. It is even commanded in the law of Moses: **“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). Therefore, we should all the more be stranger-loving toward each other, we who belong to Christ.

Peter also said that love should be without complaints. Loving strangers takes more effort than loving those we know and spend more time with. Nevertheless, we would not complain if we have fervent love for each other, including those who are strangers. The good Samaritan did not complain when he came to the aid of a stranger (see Luke 10:30-35).

## Be good stewards of the grace of God

- **As each has received a gift, serving it for yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speaks, as oracles of God. If any man serves, as of ability as God supplies. So that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly** (First Peter 4:10-11).

Every blessing we have is a gift of God, including the blessing of our very lives. The gifts that Peter is referring to in the above passage are abilities we are able to perform. And he gave two examples: speaking and serving. Peter said that if a man has a gift to speak he should speak as the oracles of God. The oracles of God have been permanently recorded for us in the Holy Bible. That magnificent book contains the most beautiful and powerful words of righteousness ever expressed.

Peter is saying that if you have the gift to speak, you should speak the way the Bible speaks: pure and righteous, concise, informative, powerful, and beautiful. Strive to model your speech after the word of God. Remember what the subordinates said to the Pharisees when they came back without bringing Jesus as they were commanded: **“A man never so spoke like this man”** (John 7:46).

The second example Peter gave was serving. There are countless ways to serve. Yet if we have some kind of gift to serve, then we should serve as of ability as God supplies. That means whatever ability God gives us we should use it as he has supplied it. In other words, we should use it to the fullest extent we have it. We should use our gifts as if we were serving Christ himself.

Peter said we should use our gifts to serve ourselves that way so that **“God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.”** God has indeed been glorified by the life of his Son Jesus Christ. And when we, the disciples of Christ, are always good stewards of the manifold grace of God, and do our very best with the gifts and abilities God has given us, then God will be glorified. Hence, God is glorified in all things through Christ; all things through Christ meaning Christ himself plus his faithful disciples. Everything about Christ (he and his faithful disciples) will glorify God.

Therefore, to Christ belongs **“the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly”** Because Christ and everything about him (including his faithful disciples) glorifies God, then he deserves to be glorified by God and given the dominion for all time. At the last supper with his apostles, Jesus told how he glorifies God and God glorifies him: **“When he [Judas Iscariot] 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 13:31-32).

And we, his faithful disciples, will also be glorified with them because we belong to them. 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).

## Be not surprised at the fieriness in you

- **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** (First Peter 4:12-13).

Fieriness in us refers to intense feelings. Sometimes evil things happen that arouse such intense feelings in us that seem like a strange thing happening to us. Peter says we should not be surprised at such feelings. Remember how Jesus felt when he was praying to his heavenly Father just before his betrayal and crucifixion: **“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).

We should not be surprised at such fieriness in us, because sometimes God allows evil things to happen in order to try our souls. Instead, we should rejoice in so far as we are partakers in the sufferings of the Christ. Whenever we suffer for truth and righteousness we are being partakers in the sufferings of the Christ. Even though we may suffer that way, our hearts should still rejoice, because Peter said that at the revealing of his glory we may rejoice, having exceeding joy, exceeding joy in heaven.

Remember what Paul said about suffering jointly with Christ: **“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).

## Being reviled for the name of Christ

- **Blessed are ye if ye are reviled for the name of Christ, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you** (First Peter 4:14).

Those who are reviled for the name of Christ are those who are open and active with their faith in him. They are the ones who let their light shine around them. Remember what Jesus said about making our righteousness visible: **“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 5:14-16).

People will appreciate our good works and will glorify God. However, the enemies of Christ are going to revile and oppose us. For after describing some of his persecutions, Paul said, **“And also all those who want to live devoutly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (Second Timothy 3:12). The enemies of Christ will persecute us as long as we let our light shine before men.

Nevertheless, Peter said we are blessed if we are reviled for the name of Christ. And remember this blessing Jesus gave for those who are persecuted because of 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”** (Matthew 5:10-11).

Peter also said the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. We know that we have the Spirit of God resting upon us, because his Holy Spirit dwells in us (see First Corinthians 3:16). What Peter meant by the spirit of glory is unclear, and this is the only place in the Bible that uses that expression. Remember, a spirit refers to energy, a dynamic and sometimes living force. And glory refers to honor, praise, exaltation, and splendor.

As faithful disciples of Christ, we have God’s promise of eternal life. Moreover, we are going to share the glory of Christ, and reign with him in heaven. We do not have those things now, but they are promised to us. And apparently God’s promise of life and glory is a dynamic and living force, a spirit that rests upon us together with God himself. That spirit of glory which rests upon us is invisible to men, but it is there because God put it upon us. He put it upon us because we are his children, suffering for him in this life. And what a wonderful comfort it is to know that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us.

## From us he is glorified

- **From them he is indeed blasphemed, but from you he is glorified** (First Peter 4:14).

From them—those who revile us because of the name of Christ—God is blasphemed. Pagan America has become so hostile to God that he is constantly being blasphemed by

his enemies, sometimes in the most vulgar and vicious ways. Ways that are too repulsive to even mention here. But in the life to come they will pay a bitter price for their blasphemies. They will burn forever in the lake of fire called hell.

In complete contrast, we who belong to Christ glorify God. We glorify him because he is so completely and absolutely worthy. Consider how they proclaim him before his throne in heaven: **“Thou are 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). Yea, truly!

## Suffer not as an evildoer

- **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 4:15-16).

Remember, Paul said it is a glory for us to suffer jointly with Christ: **“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).

However, as faithful disciples of Christ, our suffering should never be because we commit sin. That would shame us. But there is no shame in suffering as a faithful Christian. Instead, we should glorify God because of it. Remember what the record says after the apostles were arrested by the rulers of the Jews: **“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).

The examples Peter gave in his words were a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, and a busybody. Those things seem to span a range from the worst kind of sins to those considered least. Murder and theft are crimes in every society. Being an evildoer may be a crime, depending upon what the evil is.

Being a busybody is rarely if ever considered a crime in the eyes of men. But it is certainly a sin in the eyes of God. A busybody is someone who meddles in the affairs of someone else, and/or gossips about them. Such people may not be criminals, but they are sinners who deserve to suffer punishment. It is something a Christian should never do. Beware lest you become tempted that way, especially by those who love to be busybodies.

Part of being a busybody is gossiping. People do it because it is enjoyable, as Solomon said twice: **“The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts”** (Proverbs 18:8 and 26:22). Nevertheless, it is a deadly sin. Both avoid it and condemn it.

## The righteous man is scarcely saved

- **Because the time to begin judgment is from the house of God, and if first from us, what is the end of those who disobey the good news of God? And if**

**the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the irreverent and sinful man appear?** (First Peter 4:17-18).

Peter here seems to be speaking about the final judgment after this world is over. That judgment will begin with the house of God, of which we the disciples of Christ are the members. Having been saved by the redemptive power of Christ, our judgment will only be about our reward in heaven. Each one of us who believes will be rewarded, but there will be degrees of reward. That will be our judgment. For men like Peter and Paul will certainly be given greater rewards.

The end of those who disobey the good news of God will be punishment. However, just as there will be degrees of reward, so also there will be degrees of punishment. For every transgression will require its recompense of the debt owed to God. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Peter said the righteous man is scarcely saved. Indeed, the most righteous men (besides the Son of God himself) would not have been saved from the condemnation of their sins, if it were not for our redemption through Christ, because no man lives without sin. And since righteous men are scarcely saved, then the irreverent and sinful men have no hope at all. Indeed, they only have a fearful expectation of judgment and of fire.

As the author of the book of Hebrews said, **“For when we sin willfully after taking the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and of fire, a fervor that is going to devour the opposition. Any man who has disregarded the law of Moses dies without mercies from two or three witnesses.**

**“By how much worse punishment do ye think he will deserve who has trampled the Son of God, and who considered profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who treated the Spirit of grace contemptuously? For we know him who said, Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:26-31).

## Entrust your souls to a faithful Creator

- **Therefore also let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls as to a faithful Creator by well-doing** (First Peter 4:19).

Our suffering according to the will of God, refers to whatever suffering we may experience as we strive to obey the will of God. And remember, such suffering is part of being a Christian, because the book of Acts says that Paul taught the disciples **“it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22).

Therefore, as Peter said, we should entrust our souls as to a faithful Creator by well-doing. Let not suffering deter you from well-doing according to the will of God. Entrust your soul to a faithful Creator. There is nobody or anything more faithful than our Creator. Remember, all the material things of this life are untrustworthy, because they always eventually fail.

As the wise man Solomon said, **“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). Only God our Creator is completely trustworthy. And he has promised to save our souls and make us his sons forever in heaven with him, but only if we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

Therefore, continue to entrust your souls to him by well-doing, because he will never fail you.

## Peter exhorts the elders among us

- **I, a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, and a partaker of the glory going to be revealed, exhort the elders among you: Tend ye the flock of God among you, watching over, not by obligation, but willingly, nor greedily, but readily, nor as domineering over the lots, but becoming examples of the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is made known, ye will receive the unfading crown of glory** (First Peter 5:1-4).

Peter called himself a fellow elder. He was referring not just to older men, but to the congregational office of elder (also called an overseer). He was no doubt an elder of the Jerusalem church. Remember, Paul wrote about the qualifications of that office in his first letter to Timothy (see 1Ti 3) and in his letter to Titus (see Titus 1).

The above passage is addressed to the elders of the congregations of the sojourners of the Dispersion to whom this book was written. However, his words here, as well as those of the entire New Testament, were written for all of us. Hence, the words in that passage apply to all of the elders of every congregation.

Peter also said he was a witness of the sufferings of the Christ. Peter was one of the first men Jesus chose to be with him during his ministry. And there was probably no other man who saw more of the sufferings of the Christ than Peter did.

Peter also said he was a partaker of the glory going to be revealed. That glory will happen at the end of the world. Then Jesus will bring us all to be with him in heaven. And there will be no greater glory for us than to be with him there. We who are faithful disciples of Christ are all going to partake of that glory.

Remember what Paul said about it: **“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 4:16-18).

Peter referred to the members of the congregations as the flock of God. Jesus sometimes referred to us as his sheep. For example, when Jesus was speaking to the Jews, he said to the unbelievers among them, **“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”** (John 10:26-27). And one of the things Jesus said to Peter after his resurrection was **“Feed my lambs”** and **“Feed my sheep”** (John 21:15-17).

Peter exhorted the elders to tend the flock of God among us. Peter is referring to the elders as shepherds of us. Jesus also referred to himself as a shepherd. For example, he said, **“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 10:14-15). Peter called Jesus the chief Shepherd.

Peter commanded the elders to watch over us. That means to observe and protect, just as a shepherd does of his sheep. He also said an elder should not tend the flock by obligation. That means no man should be an elder of a congregation unless he desires the office. Instead, all of the elders should oversee the congregation willingly and readily. Any man who accepts the office only because of obligation is unfit for it.

Peter also warned against domineering over the lots, meaning the members of the congregation. And that is one of the greatest risks of the office of elder. There is a natural temptation by those who are given authority to use that authority in a domineering way. Paul said, **“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (First Corinthians 8:1). So also authority can puff a man up, making him arrogant and domineering. Peter warned against that happening.

Instead of being domineering, elders should become examples of the flock. An example is someone who shows how through his own actions. To promote righteousness in the members, the elders should show their righteousness. To promote love in the members, the elders should show their love.

Peter said the elders who tend the flock of God that way would receive the unfading crown of glory when the chief Shepherd is made known. Jesus the chief Shepherd will be made known to everyone at the end of the world. And all of his faithful disciples will receive the unfading crown of glory from him.

As Peter spoke of our having the spirit of glory resting upon us, so also he speaks of the elders receiving the crown of glory. Peter is the only man in the New Testament who used the expression **“crown of glory.”** However, there are two passages in the Old Testament that use that expression.

One is found in the book of Proverbs: **“The hoary head is a crown of glory. It shall be found in the way of righteousness”** (Proverbs 16:31). The other one is found in the book of Isaiah: **“In that day Jehovah of hosts will become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the residue of his people, and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate”** (Isaiah 28:5-6). Isaiah was prophesying about the destruction of the northern ten tribes of Israel because of their sinfulness.

We who are faithful disciples of Christ will all receive the unfading crown of glory. As James said, **“Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him”** (James 1:12). That crown of life is the glory of eternal life to reign with Christ in heaven as sons of God.

## Be subordinate to each other

- **Likewise younger men should be subordinate to the elder men. And all being subordinate to each other, clothe yourselves with humility, because God sets himself against the haughty, but gives grace to the lowly. Therefore be lowered under the mighty hand of God, so that he may lift you up in time, having cast all your concern upon him, because he cares for you (First Peter 5:5-7).**

Younger men should be subordinate to the elder men because elder men are more capable of leading. Younger men have strength, but older men are wiser and have the knowledge of experience. As Solomon said, **“The glory of young men is their strength, and the beauty of old men is the hoary head”** (Proverbs 20:29). The hoary head symbolizes wisdom. Therefore, younger men should be subordinate to the elder men.

Peter also said that all of us, being subordinate to each other, should clothe ourselves with humility. Paul spoke similarly when he said this: **“... submitting yourselves to each other in the fear of Christ”** (Ephesians 5:21). That means we should all humble ourselves and be obedient to whoever has authority over us. Young men should be subordinate to the older men. Wives should be subordinate to their own husbands. The congregation should be subordinate to the elders, those who lead by example and not by dominance.

Peter commanded us to clothe ourselves with humility. To clothe means to cover over or envelop. Peter used that word to show how completely humble we should be. Paul also used that word when he was speaking about our relationship with Christ. He said, **“But clothe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no forethought for lusts of the flesh”** (Romans 13:14). We should be completely enveloped by our commitment to Christ. We should also be completely committed to humility, **“... because God sets himself against the haughty, but gives grace to the lowly.”** And who can escape when God sets himself against him?

By lowering ourselves under the mighty hand of God, he will lift us up in time. The story of Joseph, son of Jacob, is one of the most beautiful and inspiring of the stories in the Bible. It tells about God lifting up a man who humbly trusted him even when everything seemed against him. Joseph’s own brothers sold him into slavery. The wife of his master falsely accused him because he refused to bed with her. And Joseph ending being in an Egyptian prison. However, after a few years, God made Joseph ruler of all Egypt subject only to Pharaoh himself. In all of his unjust suffering Joseph always trusted and obeyed God. You can read his story in Genesis 37-41.

And when we trust and obey God he will care for us the way he cared for Joseph, although certainly not in the exact same way. Therefore, as Peter says, we should cast all our concern upon him. He will never fail us.

## The devil is as a roaring lion

- **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).

Our life in this world should be taken very seriously. We should always be sober and vigilant to protect it, because there are so many dangers to our soul. Only fools make themselves stuporous and careless, and they suffer because of it. Not only are there many dangers to our body, but there are many dangers to our eternal spirit. The greatest of those dangers is our mortal enemy the devil.

Peter said the devil is like a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom to devour. Lions are predatory beasts who attack, kill, and devour. They take the flesh of other creatures and consume it to nourish and energize their own bodies. The devil strives to do the same thing with us, but in a different kind of way.

He strives to attack and kill our faith and trust in God so that he can make us a part of his kingdom and manipulate us to do his will. By so doing he destroys our souls, but he cares nothing about that. Like a roaring lion, he is totally selfish, cruel, and heartless. When Jehovah was speaking to Job about Satan (using figurative language), he said, **“His heart is as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone”** (Job 41:24). He uses men who allow him, but he hates all men because we are God’s offspring with the potential to become sons of God for eternity.

I speak much more about the devil in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*. There I make many conjectures about him, such as how he is able to walk about in the whole world that way.

Peter warned us to resist the devil and be steadfast in our faith. Like a lion the devil uses stealth to capture us. He strives to tempt and seduce us with deceit. However, unlike a lion, when we resist, he will flee from us, as James said: **“... resist the devil and he will flee from you”** (James 4:7). He cannot overpower us unless we surrender to him. And our best defense is our knowledge of the word of God and the steadfastness of our faith.

Remember how Jesus opposed each of Satan’s temptations in the wilderness by quoting the word of God (see Matthew 4). And one way to be steadfast in our faith is to remember that the same sufferings are to be accomplished in the world by our brotherhood. Remember that when you suffer for the cause of God and his righteousness. Suffering for righteousness is required of us all so that we can be worthy of becoming sons of God for eternity in heaven. Therefore, do not lose heart, but always trust God’s word and be steadfast in the faith.

## May God thoroughly prepare you

- **And may the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus (after suffering a little while) himself thoroughly prepare you. He will establish, strengthen, and provide a foundation. To him is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly** (First Peter 5:10-11).

Grace is unmerited favor. And Peter says that our heavenly Father is the God of all grace. God is the great Creator and sustainer of all things. And he does those things because of his grace; no creature in heaven or upon the earth deserves his favor, except for his only

begotten Son Jesus Christ. Our heavenly Father is the God of all grace because he is love, as John says of him: **“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16).

God created us because he loves us, and he wants to share his life with us. That is why he called us to his eternal glory. He calls us in his Son Christ Jesus, offering us the opportunity to become his children. All men are offspring of God, but only those who believe and obey Christ become his children. (We are all born children of God, but we lose that relationship with him when we first sin.) And those who remain faithful to his Son Jesus Christ will receive his eternal glory by becoming his sons in heaven.

And Peter calls upon God to himself thoroughly prepare us. We need to be thoroughly prepared by being made holy and righteous before him. And God does that through our faith in Christ and obedience to him. And when we do that, then God will establish us, strengthen us, and provide a foundation for us.

He will do those things in heaven after the time of the great judgment when we enter into the new Jerusalem there. We will be established as his sons for eternity. He will strengthen us with new incorruptible bodies. And he will provide an eternal foundation for us as permanent citizens in the new Jerusalem of heaven.

Therefore, to him is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly. The ages of the ages refers to all time, everlasting time, eternal time. And God truly deserves the glory and the dominion for all time. He has proven in countless ways how he deserves the glory and dominion for all time. Our very existence, the testimony of the Bible, and the hope we have through his Son Jesus Christ all prove his worthiness of the glory and dominion for all time.

## Peter wrote by Silvanus

- **By Silvanus, the faithful brother to you, as I reckon, I wrote because of a few things, exhorting and testifying this to be the true grace of God in which ye stand** (First Peter 5:12).

Remember, Silvanus is said to be a longer name for Silas, the man who was a traveling companion of Paul during his second missionary journey. I speak more about Silvanus in my commentary on Paul’s book of Second Corinthians (see 2Co 1:19).

Silvanus transcribed this book for Peter because Peter needed him. Remember what the record says about Peter when he was being examined by the rulers and elders of Israel: **“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). Being therefore an illiterate man Peter needed someone to transcribe his words for him. And Silvanus was the man through whom Peter wrote this first book we have from him in the Bible.

Peter said he wrote a few things, **“... exhorting and testifying this to be the true grace of God in which ye stand.”** The true grace of God is the good news of Jesus Christ. And Peter here wrote a few things about it, exhorting and testifying. To exhort means to

strongly urge. And in this book Peter indeed strongly urges us to keep our faith in Christ and be obedient to him.

Peter also testified about the good news of Christ; that it is truly from God, and our hope is in it. He testified that the true grace of God, the good news of Christ, is that in which we stand. It is the only thing which enables us to stand before God, which means to be acceptable with him.

Paul also told how the good news of Christ is that in which we stand: **“And, brothers, I make known to you the good news that I preached to you, which also ye received, and in which ye stand, by which also ye are saved if ye hold firm that word I preached to you, unless ye believed in vain”** (First Corinthians 15:1-2).

### Saluting each other

- **She in Babylon, chosen together, salutes you, and my son Mark. Salute each other by a kiss of love. Peace to you, to all those in Christ Jesus. Truly** (First Peter 5:13-14).

The Babylon that Peter mentions could not be that city of the Babylonian empire, because the prophet Isaiah said about it, **“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, nor shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.**

**“Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, nor shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures. And ostriches shall dwell there, and wild goats shall dance there. And wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged”** (Isaiah 13:19-22).

Isaiah said that the city of Babylon would **“never be inhabited, nor shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.”** What Peter may have been referring to was the province of Babylon, which territory is now in the southeastern part of modern Iraq.

Who Peter meant by she in Babylon is not known. It could refer to a woman or to a congregation. It could refer to a congregation because the Greek word for congregation is in the feminine gender. Nevertheless, Peter did say “she” was chosen together. That means “she” was a part of the body of Christ, because that is how the word “chosen” is almost always used in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, whatever Peter meant, he said that she saluted those sojourners of the Dispersion to whom Peter addressed this book. Peter said that his son Mark also saluted them. We know that Peter was married because of this passage: **“And when Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law, having been laid down, and feverish”** (Matthew 8:14). However, we know nothing from the Bible about his wife and children. All we know is that he had a son named Mark.

In four of Paul’s books near the end of them he commands us to salute each other with a kiss, a holy kiss (see Romans 16:16, First Corinthians 16:20, Second Corinthians 13:12, and First Thessalonians 5:26). At the end of this book Peter commands us to salute each other by a kiss of love. However, the command to greet each other with a kiss should no

more be taken literally, than Jesus' command to wash each other's feet. The command about kissing each other means we should greet each other warmly and with affection. In America that is done primarily with a handshake and perhaps a brief embrace.

Peter ends this book with a call for peace to them and to all those in Christ Jesus. All who are in Christ deserve peace because we love truth and righteousness, and we believe and obey the Son of God. And the time is coming when we will all enjoy eternal peace and joy in heaven with him.



# A Commentary on The Second Letter of Peter

## His salutation

- **Simon Peter, a bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (Second Peter 1:1).**

Peter said he was a bondman and an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul also spoke of himself as being a bondman and an apostle of Jesus Christ. For example, he began his book to Titus with these words: **“Paul, a bondman of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of the chosen of God, and the knowledge of truth according to piety ...”** (Titus 1:1).

A bondman is a man who is obligated to serve someone else. Both Peter and Paul were obligated to serve Christ, because he chose them to be apostles. Remember, an apostle is a man who is sent on a mission by someone else. Peter and Paul were both delighted and honored to have been so chosen. And being righteous men, they worked diligently in their service, bearing fruit beyond measure for him.

This second book of Peter was written to **“those who have received an equally precious faith with us,”** which means all Christians. His first book was addressed to **“the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion.”** That means they were Hebrews living in Gentile lands. Nevertheless remember, what Peter wrote in both books applies to us all.

Peter said we have all received an equally precious faith in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Notice how Peter said our faith is in the righteousness of Christ. We believe in Christ because we believe in his righteousness. Contrary to the slander uttered against us, our faith is not blind but completely rational. We who love truth and righteousness believe in Christ because we believe in his righteousness. We believe because of the testimony we have heard from the Holy Bible about him and his teachings.

Peter also reminded us that Jesus is both our God and our Savior. He is our God because he is the only begotten Son of God who created the world with God the Father. And he is our Savior because he gave his life so that he could earn the right to redeem us from the condemnation of our sins.

Jesus is not God the Father; he is the Son of God. But because of their perfect unity they are both called God. And remember what the psalmist said about God: **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne. Loving kindness and truth go before thy face”** (Psalm 89:14). We have faith in our God and Savior Jesus Christ because we have faith in his righteousness.

Peter said that faith is precious. It is precious because it is through our faith in Christ that we receive his salvation. And it is precious because through our faith in Christ we can become sons of God for eternity in heaven. Peter also said it was an equally precious faith. That means it is equally precious for all who have faith in his righteousness. That faith will save the soul of every man who has it.

## Granted through the knowledge of him

- **Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. As all the things of his divine power to us, things toward life and piety, were granted through the knowledge of him who called us through glory and virtue (Second Peter 1:2-3).**

Peter calls for a blessing to us: grace to us and peace be multiplied. He calls for a blessing because we have an equally precious faith in the righteousness of Christ. And he calls for that blessing to be in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Our blessings from God are because of our faith. But our faith is not blind; it is based upon knowledge. The more knowledge we have of God and Jesus our Lord, the more faith we will have in them. And in that way our blessings will be multiplied.

Indeed, Peter said that all the things of his divine power to us were granted through the knowledge of God. And those things are toward life and piety. That means God uses every means of his divine power to grant us life and piety, because he wants all men to be saved. And those means are given through the knowledge of him.

If it were in the power of God to save everyone he would certainly do it. However, our salvation cannot happen unless we believe and obey Jesus Christ. Hence, we must be persuaded to believe. That is why Jesus spent so much time reasoning with the Jews. He was trying to persuade them to repent and believe in him. And he used the knowledge of God in his reasoning.

Peter also said that God called us through glory and virtue. God called us through the glory of Jesus Christ. The glory of Christ includes his supremacy over all things, and it includes his power to redeem our souls from the condemnation caused by our sins. God also called us through virtue. Virtue is moral goodness and excellence. And God called us through the perfect virtue of Christ. For it was because of the perfect virtue of Christ that he earned the right to redeem the souls of all who belong to him. And we too must be virtuous in our lives if we are going to follow him. For life in the kingdom of God is a life of holiness and virtue.

## Companions of the divine nature

- **Because of which things, the precious and greatest promises have been given to us, so that through these ye might become companions of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption in the world in lust (Second Peter 1:4).**

Because God called us through glory and virtue, and granted us all the things of his divine power, that means the precious and greatest promises have been given to us. Those promises include saving our souls from the condemnation cause by our sins, and giving us eternal life in heaven with new incorruptible bodies.

Such promises are truly precious and great. Indeed, Peter said they were the greatest. For what could be greater than those promises? And never forget, God always keeps his prom-

ises. Remember however, his promises are contingent upon our continued faithfulness to him, because his promises are a covenant with us.

God has given us those precious and greatest promises, so that through them we might become companions of the divine nature. A companion is a man who associates with another as a comrade. The divine nature refers to what God is like. Hence, God has given us the potential to become close associates with what God is like. That means becoming like him in our spirit as his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

We were all born sons of God, but the first time we sin we lose our eternal sonship and are condemned like Adam. However, when we willfully become disciples of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, then God adopts us and elevates us to be his sons again. And when this life is over he will make us his sons for eternity in heaven, if we remain faithful to his Son Jesus Christ. Companions are those who live and share together. And as sons of God in heaven we will live with him, and will share his divine nature and his glory. I am awed every time I think of those great and wonderful promises.

Peter also mentioned how we escaped the corruption in the world in lust. Lust is the desire to indulge sinfully. There are as many different kinds of lusts as there are different kinds of desires, most of which are associated with our flesh. Indulging lust gives pleasure, but it also inevitably causes corruption, both physical and spiritual corruption. That is why there is so much corruption among men in the world.

However, as disciples of Christ we have escaped such corruption. We have escaped because we have forsaken lust. That is part of losing our lives for Christ. Remember, he said to us, **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 16:25). We forsake our worldliness, including our lusts so that we can escape corruption and save our souls.

## Furnish in your faith

- **Now this same thing also, having applied all eagerness, furnish in your faith, virtue, and in virtue, knowledge, and in knowledge, self-control, and in self-control, perseverance, and in perseverance, piety, and in piety, brotherly affection, and in brotherly affection, love** (Second Peter 1:5-7).

Not only must we forsake lust and other evil things for Christ, but we must add righteous things to our lives. Peter said we must furnish in our faith. That means we must add righteous behavior to our faith, and he listed seven examples:

virtue  
 knowledge  
 self-control  
 perseverance  
 piety  
 brotherly affection  
 love

Virtue is moral goodness and excellence. And remember, Peter had just said that God **“called us through glory and virtue.”** God called us through the virtue of Christ to also

be virtuous. For if we want to become **“companions of the divine nature”** then we too must furnish virtue—moral goodness and excellence—in our faith.

We must also furnish knowledge in our faith. Knowledge helps gives us wisdom and adds strength to our minds. As Solomon said, **“Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established, and by knowledge the chambers are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong, yea, a man of knowledge increases might”** (Proverbs 24:3-5).

Contrary to those who scoff at us, our faith is founded upon knowledge, the knowledge of God and his righteousness. And as we live our lives as disciples of Christ we must furnish knowledge in our faith. Indeed, it is our duty to continually add to our knowledge so that we can become mature, and more effective and fruitful bondmen of Christ.

Self-control is basic to our lives. It is one of the most important things needed to become mentally mature. Not having self-control is infantile and greatly weakens a man. For Solomon said, **“He whose spirit is without restraint is a city that is broken down and without walls”** (Proverbs 25:28).

We especially need to furnish self-control in our faith, because the desires of our flesh are continually against us, as 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). Paul also said: **“For the flesh desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit is against the flesh. For these are hostile to each other, so that what ye may want, these things ye should not do”** (Galatians 5:17).

We also need to furnish perseverance in our faith. To persevere is to continue steadfast in spite of difficulty and opposition. Remember what James said about persevering: **“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). God is not pleased with those who withdraw and have no perseverance.

Piety is a commitment and devotion to righteousness. And we indeed need to furnish piety in our faith. As James said, **“For as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without the works is dead”** (James 2:26). And good works are the result of piety, a commitment and devotion to righteousness.

Peter also said that we need to furnish brotherly affection in our faith. Brotherly affection for us is a feeling of fondness toward our brothers in Christ. That means we should have feelings of attraction toward each other. We should enjoy being with each other and helping each other.

Finally, Peter mentioned having love. Love should be the most important characteristic of us. For remember what Jesus said about love: **“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).

Indeed, God himself is love, as John said: **“And we know, and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him”** (First John 4:16).

## Not being idle nor unfruitful

- **For these things existing in you and abounding, it leads to not being idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he in whom these things are not present is blind, being near-sighted, having deliberately forgotten the purification of his former sins** (Second Peter 1:8-9).

Those things that Peter listed should not only exist in us, but they should abound. Those and other such things of righteousness should abound in us. They should be the chief characteristics of our lives. And when they do abound in us, Peter says **“it leads to not being idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Abounding in those moral qualities will energize us to bear much fruit for the cause of Christ.

And notice how Peter again emphasizes the importance of the knowledge of Christ. For without our knowledge of him and his good news of our salvation we cannot be fruitful for God. We cannot be fruitful for him because only the knowledge of Christ gives light to guide us in the way of true righteousness. As Peter said, **“... he in whom these things are not present is blind, being near-sighted ... .”**

Being near-sighted means not seeing well at a distance. Sinners are all spiritually near-sighted because they do not see ahead. They do not prepare to meet God. And that is also true of a disciple of Christ who does not have those values of righteousness in him.

Moreover, when those things are not present in a disciple of Christ, that means he has forgotten the purification of his former sins. And he has forgotten it willfully and deliberately, because such a man has freely chosen to forsake those values of righteousness.

And when a disciple ignores those values for his life, deliberately forgetting the purification of his former sins, he can no longer be redeemed by Christ. God will unforgive him the same way the uncompassionate bondman was unforgiven by his lord (see Matthew 18:23-35).

## Make your calling and selection sure

- **Therefore, brothers, instead be diligent to make your calling and selection sure, for doing these things, ye would, no, not ever stumble. For so the entrance will be furnished to you abundantly into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** (Second Peter 1:10-11).

God calls to every man, because he said to his disciples after his resurrection, **“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).

However, every man is not called, because God does not select every man. He only selects those who are humble and lowly, who love truth and righteousness, and who are open minded to learn. Those are the kind of men he called his sheep. Remember what he said to the Jews who were opposing 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).

Unrepentant sinners are not called and selected because their hearts are hardened. Remember what Jesus said about them: **“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).

Nevertheless, we should never be overconfident about our salvation. As Paul said, **“Therefore let him who seems to stand take heed lest he fall”** (First Corinthians 10:12). That is why Peter said we should be diligent to make our calling and selection sure. By furnishing in our faith all those good qualities he listed, and doing those things, Peter said we would no, not ever stumble. That is the diligence which makes our calling and selection sure.

And with our calling and selection sure, the entrance will be furnished to us abundantly into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The temporary kingdom of Christ is his church upon the earth. The eternal kingdom of Christ is in heaven. And our entrance into that eternal kingdom will happen after this life is over.

That is why we must be diligent to make our calling and selection sure. For we will not be furnished with the entrance into the eternal kingdom until the afterlife. The evil doctrine of once-saved-always-saved is false. Therefore, we must continue to be diligent as long as we are in this sinful world.

Notice how Peter said the entrance would be furnished to us abundantly. That means we will be richly given everything we need to enter into that eternal kingdom. One of which things is a new and incorruptible body. For when Paul was describing our resurrection from the dead, he 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).

Paul went on to say, **“For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on imperishability, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying that is written, Death was swallowed up in victory”** (First Corinthians 15:53-54).

## Always remind you

- **Therefore I will not neglect to always remind you about these things, although having known them, and having been established in the present truth. But I think it right, inasmuch as I am in this tent, to arouse you in memory** (Second Peter 1:12-13).

And because we must be diligent to make our calling and selection sure, Peter said he would not neglect to always remind us about those things. Which things are those good qualities of our character and behavior he listed that we must furnish in our faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, piety, brotherly affection, and love.

Peter said he would always remind us of them even though we have known them and are established in the present truth. Peter wrote this book to **“those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”** He wrote this book to mature Christians. Nevertheless, he said he would always remind us about those things. We need to be reminded so that we can be diligent to make our calling and selection sure. And the way we are reminded is to continually study the word of God.

What Peter meant by the present truth was the message of the good news of Christ. Over many centuries God has revealed himself and his will for us gradually through his prophets. The message of the good news of Christ is the present truth about him and his will for us. And it is now the pinnacle of spiritual truth for us in this life.

Peter said he thought it was right to arouse us in memory. Peter was a humble man. He gave us credit for having known those things, and having been established in the present truth. Nevertheless, it was right for him to arouse our memory about those things. It is always right to arouse our memory about those things lest we forget them. And if someone else does not arouse our memory, then we should arouse them ourselves, because we will be judged about them.

Peter said he was in “this tent.” He was speaking figuratively about his body of flesh. Paul also used that metaphor, when he 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, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked. For also those who are in the tent groan, being burdened, not in that we want to undress, but to clothe ourselves, so that the mortal may be swallowed up by the life”** (Second Corinthians 5:1-4).

## Putting off of his tent

- **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 1:14-15).

How Peter knew that his death was imminent (the putting off of his tent) is not known. Nor is it known when and where he died. The Roman Catholics claim Peter died at Rome, but there is no proof of it. They want people to believe Peter died there because Rome is their capital, and they claim he was their first Pope.

Nevertheless, we do know that Peter died by crucifixion, because, as Peter said, after Jesus' resurrection he indicated that to him. Jesus had met with some of his apostles on the shore of a lake after they had been fishing all night. There Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep. Then he said to him, **“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”** (John 21:18-19).

In this book Peter said he would endeavor for us to always have, after his departure, the memory of those things to apply. By having his words recorded in writing we can always have the memory of those things to apply. And not only did Peter record his words in writing, but the New Testament contains all the words we need to teach us and remind us of the things we need to apply to our lives.

That record lives on long after all of the apostles have departed from this life. And it will always remain, because Jesus said to his disciples, **“The sky and the earth will pass away, but my words may, no, not pass away”** (Matthew 24:35).

## Eyewitnesses of his majesty

- **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** (Second Peter 1:16).

Peter and the other apostles revealed the power and presence of Christ to every man who would listen to their testimony. In their preaching they told of his many miracles, which revealed the power of God in him. They revealed his presence by describing how they lived with him during the three years of his ministry. They revealed how he was resurrected from the dead, and then after forty days he ascended into heaven in their sight. They proclaimed the truth about him, not only of his power but also of how he lived.

The apostles were not men who followed in cunningly devised myths. The world has been led astray from the truth by many cunningly devised myths. False religions like Islam and Hinduism, and false ideologies like evolution and humanism have led astray millions of souls. And the consequences have been countless evils and sufferings in the world.

Whole books have been written about those myths, some of which have tried to expose them as myths. However, the most powerful weapon to expose them is the knowledge of the truth found in the Bible. That knowledge will open your eyes to see how false and how evil those myths are.

Peter said they did not follow in cunningly devised myths, but were men who became eyewitnesses of the majesty of that man. They became eyewitnesses because Jesus chose them to be with him during his ministry and to be his apostles. And being eyewitnesses,

his apostles were able to give direct testimony about him. They saw his power and presence with their own eyes, and that is what they revealed to us.

## Hearing God's voice from heaven

- **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** (Second Peter 1:17-18).

Peter told of hearing God's voice from heaven when he was with Jesus on a mountain. That was an example of seeing the power and presence of Christ. Here is that story: **“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 Son, the beloved 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 source of that voice did not identify himself, but it was so awe inspiring that Peter knew it was from Almighty God. Peter called him the Majestic Glory. And God is truly the Majestic Glory, the one and only Majesty of all things, and who is worthy of supreme glory.

Jesus had been receiving honor and glory from God during his ministry. And on that great occasion the mighty voice from God, the Majestic Glory, was brought to Jesus, proclaiming that he was God's Son, the beloved in whom he was well pleased.

Peter testified that he heard that voice of such kind that was brought out of heaven, because he, James, and John were with Jesus on that holy mountain. That experience was just another example verifying the divinity of Jesus. And testifying of it was part of Peter's revealing to us the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter called that mountain, upon which he heard the voice from the Majestic glory, a holy mountain. It was holy then, but it is not holy now. There are some people who believe that if something was ever holy it is always holy. That is not true. Israel was once called the holy land by the prophet Zechariah, when he said, **“And Jehovah shall inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and shall yet choose Jerusalem”** (Zechariah 2:12).

In that passage Zechariah was referring to the return of the Jews after their conquest and exile by the Babylonians. It was after their return that Jesus the Son of God came among them. His presence made Israel a holy land. However, Israel is no longer the holy land. It is now an unholy land, filled with sin and violence. And the mountain upon which Peter, James, and John heard the voice of God is no longer a holy mountain. Besides nobody now knows where that mountain was.

## We have the prophetic word sure

- **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** (Second Peter 1:19).

The many examples of the power and presence of Jesus prove that we have the prophetic word sure. The prophetic word is the good news of Jesus Christ. And we have that word sure because of the many testimonies of the faithful men who wrote the Bible. Any man who is humble in his heart, who loves truth and righteousness, and who is open minded to learn, will see that the good news of Christ is truly from God.

Therefore, we do well when we give heed to it. For by giving heed to the good news of Christ we can be saved from the condemnation cause by our sins, and can become sons of God for eternity in heaven. Is that not doing well? How could we ever do better?

Peter said that prophetic word was as a lamp shining in a dark place. Many times Christ and his good news are referred to as light. For example, Jesus said about himself, **“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”** (John 12:25-36).

The apostle John also told how the good news of Christ is light: **“Again, a new commandment I write to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light now shines. He who claims to be in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness until now”** (First John 2:8-9).

The daystar usually refers to the planet Venus when it is very visible at dawn. The day dawning, and the daystar arising in our hearts is poetic language for the knowledge of the good news entering into our hearts. As we gain knowledge of Christ and his good news of salvation our hearts are enlightened to the truth. And we should be as eager for that to happen as we are for the day to dawn after a night of darkness.

## Not of a personal interpretation

- **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** (Second Peter 1:20-21).

Prophecies are always the words of God. They are sometime predictions of the future, or sometimes about other things such as commandments. What Peter meant by no prophecy of scripture coming to pass of a personal interpretation is that no passage or text of scripture ever originated from a man. For example, the scriptures that Moses wrote in the Old Testament did not happen from his own ideas. The scriptures Peter wrote that we have recorded in the New Testament did not happen from his own ideas.

No prophecy (passage, text) of scripture is from any man's own ideas. No man originated any prophecy, no passage or text of scripture. No man ever willed any prophecy from God on his own. Every prophecy, every passage or text of scripture originated from the Holy Spirit of God. God always chose holy men to be led by his Holy Spirit when making prophecies. Those holy men spoke their prophecies by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. None of them ever originated their prophecies.

### False teachers among us

- **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** (Second Peter 2:1).

Along with the true prophets of God, false prophets developed among the people of Israel. For example, the true prophet Jeremiah said about the false prophets of Jerusalem after the Babylonians destroyed the city, **“Thy prophets have seen false and foolish visions for thee. And they have not uncovered thine iniquity, to bring back thy captivity, but have seen for thee false oracles and causes of banishment”** (Lamentations 2:14).

Paul spoke of false apostles among the early Christians, when he said, **“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”** (Second Corinthians 11:12-13).

Peter told how false teachers among the disciples of Christ would sneak in pernicious denominations. Pernicious denominations are harmful divisions among Christians that are created insidiously and stealthily. Originated by false teachers, they lure disciples away from the genuine good news of Christ, substituting their own doctrines.

Paul warned the elders of the congregation at Ephesus about that, saying to them, **“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).

Notice how Peter refers to Christ as the Master who bought them. Jesus only purchased from God those who become his disciples. All other men are lost in their sins. Yet some of those whom Jesus purchased became false teachers, as Peter explained in that passage. How then can men proclaim the doctrine of once-saved-always-saved. Such men are themselves false teachers.

Some of them sneak in pernicious denominations. And the way they deny him is to describe Jesus very differently from what he is really like. They create a mythical Christ that the people want to believe in, an effeminate looking pacifist who never becomes angry or hates anyone. And by so doing they deny the authentic Christ.

Regarding these words, **“But false prophets also developed among the people, as false teachers will also be among you ...”** notice how he spoke of the prophets in the past tense, but the teachers in the future tense. Prophets of God (in the sense of being inspired by the Holy Spirit) no longer exist now that we have the New Testament record.

## The way of the truth blasphemed

- **And many will follow their wantonness, because of whom the way of the truth will be blasphemed** (Second Peter 2:2).

The book of Revelation gives an example of a pernicious denomination that taught and practiced wantonness. That denomination was the congregation in Thyatira. That was one of the seven congregations of Asia that Jesus sent messages to through the apostle John.

Jesus said to John about them, **“And to the agent of the congregation in Thyatira write, These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet resembling highly refined metal: I know thy works, and thy love and faith and service and perseverance. And thy last works are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou tolerate thy woman Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my bondmen to fornicate, and to eat idol sacrifices”** (Revelation 2:18-20).

Practicing fornication and feasting with idol sacrifices is certainly wantonness. And such things do cause the way of the truth to be blasphemed. Unbelievers can see the hypocrisy of disciples doing such things. And they not only condemn the hypocrisy, but they condemn the way of truth itself.

Paul told how the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles by the hypocritical behavior of Jews, when he said to them, **“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).

## Exploiting with fabricated words

- **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 2:3).

Peter said that false teachers motivated by greed will exploit us using fabricated words. Greed can be for material things or it can be for other things like popularity and power. The motives of those who teach the truth are never selfish. Their desire is to serve the Lord our God. And they never profit from worldly things because people hate the truth of God, and they persecute those who proclaim it.

For example, remember what Stephen said to the Jews, the men who were supposed to be the people of God: **“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 7:52-53). Greedy men never proclaim the truth, although they commonly mix a little truth in with their lies to make them seem genuine.

False teachers use fabricated words to lure and manipulate. They say things that the people want to hear, not the true words of God. And in that way they gain popularity and power. Remember what the apostle Paul said about pleasing men: **“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).

The only sure defense against their cunningly devised myths is the true word of God. Never trust their charm and their alluring words. Arm yourself with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Study the Bible carefully and you will not be exploited by the fabricated words of false teachers.

Peter said that judgment against false teachers is not idle for long, and their destruction will not slumber. Regardless of how successful false teachers may become, the judgment of God is against them. He always eventually destroys them. If their destruction is not in this life it will be in the life to come. Trust the justice of God.

## Not sparing those who sin

- **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, and he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, the eighth, a herald of righteousness, when he brought on a flood upon the world of the irreverent, and he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, being reduced to ashes, having made an example of men who were going to be irreverent** (Second Peter 2:4-6).

In that passage Peter gives three examples of the judgment of God:

- agents (of heaven) who sinned
- the antediluvian world
- the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

The Bible says very little about agents of heaven who sin. But Jude also told how those heavenly agents who sinned were placed in bondage: **“And the agents who did not keep their own principality, but left their own habitation, he has kept reserved in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day”** (Jude 1:6).

The fact that the agents of heaven can sin indicates they too are offspring of God, having free will. The Bible does speak about Satan having had agents in heaven. That is told when it describes how Satan was cast out of heaven (after Jesus ascended to the throne of God): **“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”** (Revelation 12:7-9).

What is meant by the chains of darkness and a place of punishment is not told. The Greek word for that place is tartarus (transliterated), and that word is only used in this passage. Nevertheless, that place of punishment includes being bound in darkness. Darkness alone is a kind of bondage, because being in continual darkness is very restricting.

Regarding the antediluvian world, God destroyed those men when they became so sinful. The record about it says, **“And the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth”** (Genesis 6:11-13). That was when God commanded Noah to build the ark to save himself and his family. Notice how God did not create the ark for Noah. God wants us to work with him.

Noah was of the tenth generation after Adam. Hence, when the passage speaks of Noah being “the eighth” it probably means he was one of eight souls to be saved in the ark. For Noah had a wife and three sons; and each of those sons had wives. All of whom were to be saved. Therefore, there were eight souls saved in the ark. And Noah was probably the last one to enter into it, making him the eighth that way.

Regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, Jehovah had visited Abraham, and he told him of the sinfulness of those two cities. The record says, **“And Jehovah said [to Abraham], 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 then sent two of his heavenly agents to investigate those cities. What they found showed how sinful those men were. 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). The remains of those cities have never been found.

Peter said the destruction of those cities was **“made an example of men who were going to be irreverent.”** Men cannot sin against God with impunity, especially those who commit serious sins like homosexuality, which was a major sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story of those two cities is an example for all men to learn. But it was given especially to warn men about being irreverent. And having that example, no man can appear before God in the day of judgment and claim ignorance.

## Righteous Lot

- **And he rescued righteous Lot, being distressed by the conduct of the lawless in their licentiousness (for that righteous man dwelling among them day after day, in the sight and hearing of their lawless deeds, it anguished his righteous soul), the Lord knows how to rescue the pious out of temptation, and to hold in reserve unrighteous men being cut off for a day of judgment** (Second Peter 2:7-9).

Lot was the nephew of Abraham who came with him when Jehovah told Abraham to go to a land he would show him. When their flocks and herds became too great to stay together, Lot separated and went to the territory of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot was in Sodom when the agents of God came to investigate the cities. After learning how wicked those cities were, they took Lot, his wife, and their two daughters out of Sodom. That was just before God destroyed the cities. The story is told in Genesis 19.

Three times in the above passage Peter called Lot a righteous man. And it tells how his righteous soul was anguished by the lawless deeds of those licentious people. Yet modern men condemn Lot for having settled in Sodom when he separated from Abraham. I even heard a popular televangelist rail against Lot.

However, I have no doubt neither Abraham nor Lot were aware of how sinful the men of Sodom were. Indeed, the Bible tells how Abraham had been on friendly relations with the king of Sodom (see Genesis 14). In fact, Abraham even pleaded with Jehovah to spare those cities from destruction. Jehovah said he would spare the cities if there were found as few as ten righteous men among them (see Genesis 18-20-33).

Apparently then, like Noah and the antediluvian world, Lot and his family were the only righteous souls in Sodom and Gomorrah. And as Peter said, the Lord knows how to rescue the pious out of temptation. He also knows how to hold in reserve unrighteous men being cut off for a day of judgment. He knew how to rescue Noah and Lot, and he knew how to hold in reserve the sinners of the Antediluvian world and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah who were being cut off for a day of judgment.

Being cut off for a day of judgment means sinners were being separated from righteous men in preparation for their destruction. That reminds me of what Isaiah said about the impending destruction of the wicked: **“The righteous man perishes, and no man lays it to heart. And merciful men are taken away; none considering that the righteous man is taken away from the evil. He enters into peace. They rest in their beds, each one who walks in his uprightness”** (Isaiah 57:1-2).

The perishing of a righteous man that Isaiah mentions probably refers to righteous men who live out their lives and are not replaced. They are not replaced because the remaining righteous men are taken away, leaving only the wicked to face the evil of God’s wrath against them. God knows how to rescue the righteous, and how to reserve the unrighteous for judgment.

## Reckless and self-willed

- **And especially those going rear of flesh in a degenerate lust, and who despise lordship. Reckless, self-willed men, they do not tremble when speaking evil of dignities** (Second Peter 2:10).

Going rear of flesh in a degenerate lust refers to what we now call sodomy, which specifically refers to the perverse and filthy act of anal intercourse practiced by homosexuals. Such men do it because of their degenerate sexual lust for other men. It disgusts me just to think about it.

The kind of men that Peter speaks about not only practice Sodomy, but they also despise lordship. That means they hate any kind of authority over them. And that makes them reckless and self-will, and consequently lawless.

Moreover, Peter said they did not tremble when speaking evil of dignities. Dignities are things that are noble and elevated in status. Such evil men have no fear of speaking evil of things that are noble and elevated. They are great fools who deserve great punishment, and eventually they will get it, unless they repent. That is certain.

## No railing judgment

- **Whereas agents, being greater in might and power, do not bring a railing judgment against them before the Lord (Second Peter 2:11).**

Peter contrasts those wretched sinners who do those things with the agents of heaven. God's heavenly agents have much greater might and power than any of us. Yet they do not bring a railing judgment before the Lord against those fools. Those sinners certainly deserve being condemned, but the agents of heaven rightfully wait for the Lord God to judge them. God's agents in heaven are too righteous and dignified to pass judgment for themselves that way, even against such wretched fools.

And we too should not bring railing judgments against them before the Lord. It is the duty of our authorities to impose whatever punishments they deserve. We can condemn them as Peter does here, but railing judgments should not be part of it.

## Like the irrational beasts of nature

- **But these men are like the irrational beasts of nature, having been born for capture and destruction (Second Peter 2:12).**

The beasts of nature are irrational creatures; they do not think. They only respond to their instincts and impulses. None of them have free will, because only men are created in the image of God. (Men have domesticated the wildness out of some beasts, making them fit for our use.)

Peter said those wretched sinners that he described were no better than the irrational beasts of nature. They deserve capture and destruction. Although every man is born an offspring of God with a pure spirit, some men corrupt themselves into evil spirits. And as a consequence they become no better than the beasts of nature. They make themselves worthy only of capture and destruction.

Those worthy of immediate destruction are the ones who commit capital crimes. Those worthy of capture are the ones who are so wild and lawless they need to be imprisoned. And unless they repent, in the afterlife they will be captured, bound, and suffer the punishment of the second death of hell.

## Destroyed in their corruption

- **Speaking evil at which things they do not understand, they will be destroyed in their corruption, getting back a wage of unrighteousness** (Second Peter 2:12-13).

There are many things we do not understand. And although our knowledge increases, there will always be many things we do not understand. We will always need to trust God about many things. However, foolish sinners speak evil of which things they do not understand. God has commanded us to do some things, and he has commanded us against other things. However, foolish sinners speak evil of many of those commands. They speak evil of them because they do not understand.

You can see many examples of that in the world. Feminists speak evil of God's commands about women. Humanists speak evil of God's commands about punishment. Atheists speak evil of God himself.

However, as Peter said, the foolish sinners who speak evil at which things they do not understand will be destroyed in their corruption, getting back a wage of unrighteousness. For example, speaking evil of God's commands about women has resulted in the corruption of marriage, which is a consequence (a wage) of that unrighteousness. Speaking evil of God's commands about punishment has resulted in much lawlessness in the land, which is a consequence (a wage) of that unrighteousness. And speaking evil of God himself has resulted in the moral and spiritual decadence of the people, which is a consequence (a wage) of that unrighteousness.

Remember what Paul said about consequences: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows this he will also reap. Because he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life”** (Galatians 6:7-8).

## Children of a curse

- **Men who consider soft living in the daytime to be pleasure, spots and blemishes, reveling in their deceitfulness while they feast together with you, having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, children of a curse, having forsaken a straight path, they were led astray** (Second Peter 2:13-15).

Peter listed eight more characteristics of such sinners:

- considering soft living in the daytime to be pleasure
- spots and blemishes
- reveling in their deceitfulness while they feast together with you
- having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin
- enticing unstable souls
- having a heart trained in greed
- children of a curse
- having forsaken a straight path, they were led astray

Men who consider soft living in the daytime to be pleasure are called sluggards. Solomon had many things to say about sluggards, none of it good. Here is one thing he said: **“The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men who can render a reason”** (Proverbs 26:16). The sluggard thinks he is wise because he has no responsibilities and he does not work. He claims he is enjoying a life of retirement, even though he may be completely derelict and living in squalor.

Spots and blemishes are signs of defects, damage, and disease. And that is what such sinners are to the Lord our God. They must be rejected among us because we are a holy people. Only genuine repentance, with faith and obedience to Christ, can cleanse them and make them acceptable.

Peter’s comment about feasting together with us is apparently about hypocrites among us because they revel in their deceitfulness. Using deceit gives a man a special advantage. And those who use deceit enjoy having that advantage. Hence, they revel in their deceitfulness, even while they feast together with us. Nevertheless, their works eventually expose them.

Having eyes full of adultery and unceasing sin means their thoughts are always focused on finding ways to indulge their lusts, and on every way to violate the restrictions of lawfulness. Like deceitfulness, sinfulness gives them an advantage over other men.

Moreover, those evil men entice unstable souls. To entice means to lure and tempt. And unstable souls are those who are not solidly grounded in their faith and righteousness. That makes them more vulnerable to being lured and tempted. Hence, they are more easily manipulated and preyed upon. Predators always prefer the weak.

Peter also said such sinners have a heart trained in greed. Greed is having an excessive desire for things. Men whose hearts are trained in greed are those who habitually strive to get more than they deserve. They do it by depriving others.

They are truly children of a curse. A curse is a call for harm against someone or something. Being children of a curse means it is their nature to produce harm. Hence, whoever does things with them will suffer harm.

As Peter said, they forsook a straight path, and were led astray. Straight paths symbolize things that are righteous. However, those evil men have forsaken the straight paths, and have chosen to live crooked lives. Therefore, they were led astray into the ways of sin and wickedness, which gives them special advantages for a while, but inevitably ends in hell.

## Balaam the prophet

- **Men who followed the way of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved the wage of unrighteousness. But he had a rebuke of his own lawbreaking. A mute donkey, uttering in a man’s voice, restrained the madness of the prophet** (Second Peter 2:15-16).

Having escaped Egyptian bondage, the sons of Israel were in the wilderness on their way to their promised land. After they defeated the Amorites who attacked them, the people of Moab were very afraid. Balak the king of Moab sent messengers to the prophet Balaam, who lived near the Euphrates river, and he said to him, **“Come now therefore, I pray**

thee, curse for me this people, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom thou bless is blessed, and he whom thou curse is cursed” (Numbers 22:6).

Balaam then inquired of God, who replied to him, **“Thou shall not go with them. Thou shall not curse the people, for they are blessed”** (Numbers 22:12). After Balaam refused Balak, other messengers were sent promising him many honors and rewards. Here is what happened next:

**“And Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God, to do less or more.**

**“Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what Jehovah will speak to me more. And God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, go with them, but only the word which I speak to thee, that shall thou do. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and went with the rulers of Moab. And God’s anger was kindled because he went, and the agent of Jehovah placed himself in the way for an adversary against him.**

**“Now he was riding upon his donkey, and his two servants were with him. And the donkey saw the agent of Jehovah standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way, and went into the field. And Balaam smote the donkey, to turn her into the way.**

**“Then the agent of Jehovah stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And the donkey saw the agent of Jehovah, and she thrust herself to the wall, and crushed Balaam’s foot against the wall. And he smote her again.**

**“And the agent of Jehovah went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And the donkey saw the agent of Jehovah, and she lay down under Balaam. And Balaam’s anger was kindled, and he smote the donkey with his staff.**

**“And Jehovah opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to thee, that thou have smitten me these three times? And Balaam said to the donkey, Because thou have mocked me. I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed thee. And the donkey said to Balaam, Am not I thy donkey, upon which thou have ridden all thy life long to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to thee? And he said, No.**

**“Then Jehovah opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the agent of Jehovah standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand. And he bowed his head, and fell on his face. And the agent of Jehovah said to him, Why have thou smitten thy donkey these three times? Behold, I have come forth as an adversary, because thy way is perverse before me. And the donkey saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. Unless she had turned aside from me, surely now I would have even slain thee, and saved her alive.**

**“And Balaam said to the agent of Jehovah, I have sinned, for I knew not that thou stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get back again.**

**And the agent of Jehovah said to Balaam, Go with the men, but only the word that I shall speak to thee, that thou shall speak. So Balaam went with the rulers of Balak”** (Numbers 22:18-35).

Although God told Balaam to go that second time, he was very angry with him. Balaam had inquired of God the second time because of his greed. He violated the law of God by loving the wage of unrighteousness. Balaam wanted to curse the people of Israel, even though God said they were blessed. He wanted to curse them because he loved the honors and rewards Balak offered him.

Balaam was so eager to go to Balak that he did not even notice that his donkey was able to speak to him. His eagerness blinded his mind. Peter called it madness. Sin can have that power over a man. It can cause a man to do things irrationally. David’s lust for the wife of Uriah blinded him to the great sins he was committing (see Second Samuel 11 for that sad story). Therefore, beware of the desire to sin. Guard yourself against all temptations, and pray that God will deliver you from them, because they can be powerful.

### Uttering swollen things of vanity

- **These men are waterless wells, and clouds driven by a fierce wind, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved into an age. For, uttering swollen things of vanity, they entice (to sensuality by lusts of flesh) those who actually escaped from those who live in error, promising them freedom, while they themselves are bondmen of corruption, for by what any man has been overcome, of this he has also been enslaved** (Second Peter 2:17-19).

Waterless wells are those where men have wasted their time and labor digging for water but never finding any. Clouds driven by a fierce wind include such destructive storms as tornados and hurricanes. Thus those sinful men are not only useless products of hopeful labor, but are destructive to things that are productive. Therefore, the gloom of darkness has been reserved for them into an age, which age is the afterlife.

Peter also said they utter swollen things of vanity. Such men are typically arrogant boasters. They utter things of vanity because they involve themselves in useless things, such as ventures that are foolish, fraudulent, and unrealistic. They are swollen because the things they utter are overestimated by their overconfidence.

They are fools. And Solomon said about them, **“Wisdom is before the face of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth”** (Proverbs 17:24). Wise men attend to things they can work with, but the mind of fools is on unrealistic and unattainable things.

By uttering swollen thing of vanity they entice **“those who actually escaped from those who live in error.”** That means they entice men who had already been converted to Christ. Every man who becomes a disciple of Christ escapes from those who live in error. However, those wretched men that Peter speaks about entice those converts to sensuality by lusts of the flesh, and promise them freedom.

Remember what the Lord said to the agent of the congregation at Thyatira: **“I know thy works, and thy love and faith and service and perseverance. And thy last works are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou tolerate thy woman Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my bondmen to fornicate, and to eat idol sacrifices”** (Revelation 2:19-20).

That woman Jezebel enticed souls in that congregation (who had actually escaped from those who live in error) to sensuality, indulging their lusts of the flesh by committing fornication and feasting on idol sacrifices. She no doubt promised them freedom to do those things because she claimed she was a prophetess.

Peter said that such men promise freedom, but they themselves were bondmen of corruption. They were bondmen because **“by what any man has been overcome, of this he has also been enslaved.”** Addictions are what overcome a man and enslave him. Jesus also said, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that every man who does the sin is a bondman of the sin”** (John 8:34). That means being addicted to the sin.

Those evil men Peter was condemning were bondmen of corruption. That means they were addicted to their sins, because sin always leads to corruption. In my book *Kings Solomon's Advice for the World*, I explain the entire process of addictions.

Many modern sinners are of the same kind. They promise freedom, but they themselves are bondmen to their corrupt behavior, being addicted to it. Solomon spoke of such men when he said, **“There is a generation who curses their father, and does not bless their mother. There is a generation who are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.”** (Proverbs 30:11-12).

## Being entangled again

- **For if, having escaped the defilements of the world by knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and, having been again entangled in these, they are overcome, the last things have become worse for them than the first** (Second Peter 2:20).

The defilements of the world are the many different kinds of sins that prevail. Being entangled means being caught up by or into something. Sinners become entangled in the defilements of the world. They are enticed by the lusts of their flesh to the pleasures of sin. And because those things are so prevalent in the world, it is easy for them to become entangled in sins with their perverse pleasures. And their entanglement often keeps them blind to their lost condition.

However, the knowledge of the good news of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can open the eyes of those who are entangled in the defilements of the world. And in that way they can escape from them. But Peter warns that becoming again overcome and entangled in them will make the (spiritual) condition of the man worse than it was at the first, and even more difficult to escape them.

## Better not to have known

- **For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. But that of the true proverb has happened to them, The dog returning to his own vomit, and the sow that washed to wallowing in mire** (Second Peter 2:21-22).

Men who lack knowledge of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ are restrained only by their consciences and by their fear of punishment. When the knowledge of Christ is embraced by a man, it not only strengthens his conscience but it also increases in him his love of righteousness.

Therefore, when such a man is again overcome and entangled in the defilements of the world, he becomes less restrained about sinning. Being overcome again by the pleasures of sin apparently has a more destructive effect on his conscience. Moreover, the knowledge of Christ will not have the same good influence on him as at the first. Therefore it was better for him not to have known the way of righteousness, because the last things become worse for him than the first.

Peter gives a very vivid proverb to show how horribly evil backsliding from Christ and his good news makes a man. Such a man makes himself like a disgusting dog and a filthy pig, being attracted to the most disgusting kinds of filth.

That very process is happening to the population of America. We were once a righteous nation with faith in Christ and the word of God. But now, having rejected God and his righteousness, the people are indulging themselves in the most disgusting and filthy kinds of sins.

I sometimes feel like the righteous man Lot **“dwelling among them day after day, in the sight and hearing of their lawless deeds, it anguished his righteous soul”** (Second Peter 2:8). I learn of those evil things in my country through our modern mass communication media, primarily television and the internet.

Nevertheless, I am very grateful that, unlike Sodom and Gomorrah, there yet remain many righteous souls in my country, because of whom the wrath of God is restrained.

## A reminder

- **I write to you now this second letter, beloved, in which I arouse your sincere mind by a reminder, to remember the sayings that were earlier spoken by the holy prophets, and of the command of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior** (Second Peter 3:1-2).

At the beginning of this book Peter said he wrote it **“to those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”** That means all of us who are faithful disciples of Christ. He now calls us beloved. And he compliments us when he says we have a sincere mind. Peter could say those things without knowing us personally, because he loved everyone who was a genuine Christian.

This is now the second time Peter says he wrote to remind them (and us) of God's word. Peter wrote his first letter (what we have in the New Testament) to **“the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ... .”** And he wrote this letter to **“those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

Whether Peter was still writing to **“the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ...”** in this second letter that we have is not clear. Nevertheless, such things are unimportant to us to know, because what he wrote is for every Christian.

Here is what Peter said in that first letter about reminding them: **“Therefore I will not neglect to always remind you about these things, although having known them, and having been established in the present truth. 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 1:12-15).

Peter said in this second letter that he wanted them to remember the sayings (1) **“that were earlier spoken by the holy prophets,”** and, (2) **“of the command of your apostles of the Lord and Savior.”** The sayings earlier spoken by the holy prophets are found in the Old Testament of the Bible. It is a serious mistake when Christians think the words of the Old Testament have no value now for us. Peter said otherwise. For there are many words of wisdom in the Old Testament that we will always need to know.

The sayings **“of the command of us apostles of the Lord and Savior”** refer to all of the teachings of the New Testament. For after his resurrection, Jesus gave this command to the apostles: **“Having gone into all the world, preach ye the good news to the whole creation”** (Mark 16:15). And the good news is taught throughout the New Testament. Peter therefore wanted us to remember that command of the apostles. He said it was **“the command of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,”** because Peter was one of his apostles.

## Scoffers will come

- **Knowing this first, that there will come at the end of the days, scoffers, proceeding according to their own desires, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For, from since the fathers became asleep, all things continue this way from the beginning of creation** (Second Peter 3:3-4).

What Peter meant by the end of the days is the same thing that Paul called the last days in this passage: **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come”** (Second Timothy 3:1). **“The last days”** and **“the end of the days”** are simply expressions referring to the future. The reason is because the word future is not found in the Bible. To my knowledge there is no ancient Greek word equivalent to the English word future, just as there is no English word equivalent to the Greek word GINOMAI. Many languages have words that are not equivalent to words in other languages.

Peter is warning the reader to expect scoffers to come in the future and ridicule the coming of Christ. The wise man Solomon wrote much about scoffers. Here are two of his proverbs about them: **“The proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name. He works in the arrogance of pride”** (Proverbs 21:24), and, **“A scoffer seeks wisdom, and finds it not, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding”** (Proverbs 14:6).

Scoffers are arrogant men who have no wisdom. A man may be wise in some things, but ignorant and foolish in others. Such men are common among the enemies of Christ. For example, there are many scholars and scientists nowadays who are scoffers about God and the Bible. Their worldly knowledge has puffed them up and led them astray. Paul warned about knowledge and pride, when he said, **“We know that all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (First Corinthians 8:1).

Men with worldly knowledge who become puffed up and scoff at God and the Bible are ignorant and foolish about things spiritual. What knowledge they have about God and the Bible is shallow and filled with errors. In their knowledge of God and the Bible they are like the men at the congregation in Laodicea, of whom Jesus said, **“... thou say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and do not know that thou are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”** (Revelation 3:17).

They do not want to know the truth of God and the Bible because they hate him and his holy word. Therefore, they scoff at him and indulge their own sinful desires. Rather than believe the truth about God they make such stupid claims as the world and everything in it just happened for no reason. In contrast, our faith and hope are in a wise Creator. Their faith is in the dumb elements and blind chance. And they have no hope.

Dear reader, be not led astray by such men, regardless of how much worldly knowledge they may have. They are in fact stupid and ignorant about God and the Bible. What knowledge they may have about him is superficial and perverted. Beware of letting the blind lead you. And be sure to remember these wise words about them: **“He who corrects a scoffer gets himself reviling. And he who reproveth a wicked man gets himself a bruise. Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate thee. Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee”** (Proverbs 9:7-8).

## Past destruction

- **For this is willfully ignored by them, that long ago there were heavens, and an earth that came together out of water and by water by the word of God, by which the world then perished, having been overflowed with water** (Second Peter 3:5-6).

Scoffers are willfully ignorant of the facts of the Bible. They refuse to believe them, calling them myths. Nevertheless, God did destroy the antediluvian world with a great flood. Scoffers are like the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand to escape something. They are willfully ignorant of the fact that God did bring a great flood upon the earth because of the sinfulness of mankind.

Scoffers would rather say, **“Where is the promise of his coming? For, from since the fathers became asleep, all things continue this way from the beginning of creation.”** And they refuse to believe that all things did not continue this way from the beginning of

creation. They choose to be willfully ignorant. By definition that makes them fools. Paul said of such men, **“Professing to be wise, they became foolish...”** (Romans 1:22).

## Future destruction

- **But now the heavens and the earth, which have been stored up by the same word, are being preserved for fire in a day of judgment and destruction of irreverent men** (Second Peter 3:7).

God promised mankind that after the great flood he would never again destroy the earth that way: **“And God spoke to Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you. Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood, nor shall there be a flood any more to destroy the earth.**

**“And God said, This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my bow in the cloud [the rainbow], and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.**

**“And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth”** (Genesis 9:8-17).

But now, as Peter says, the heavens and the earth **“are being preserved for fire in a day of judgment and destruction of irreverent men.”** In the past God destroyed the surface of the earth (including mankind) with the great flood, but the time is coming when he will destroy the heavens and the earth with fire.

The world is continually reminded of that covenant (not to destroy the world again by a flood) with the sign of the rainbow. However, the world is now being preserved for destruction by fire. It will be destroyed by fire in a day of judgment and destruction of irreverent men. And the world is continually reminded of that new destruction by the testimony of the Bible.

(Have you ever considered that almost all of the world is already on fire. Indeed, the earth itself only has a relatively thin surface (being less than one percent of the earth) that is not on fire. We can see the fire of our planet by the occasional volcanic eruptions that occur.)

God’s children, the disciples of Christ, will not be destroyed that way with them. For Jesus will come and take us up in the air to be with him, as Paul said: **“... 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"** (First Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Here is a description of what will happen to irreverent men at the end of the world: **"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).

### One day and a thousand years

- **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).

Remember this passage about God: **"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).

Hence, Peter could say **"that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."** Time for God is not the same as time for us. God is always aware of everything that happens everywhere. And there are more things that happen in one day than all of the things our historians write about that happen in a thousand years. That is one way to think of one day with the Lord being as a thousand years. And in the same way, for the Lord a thousand years is as one day. God is eternal, and for him a thousand years is a very short time.

### The Lord is not slack about his promise

- **The Lord is not slack about his promise, as some regard slackness, but is patient toward us, not wanting any to perish, but all to go forward to repentance** (Second Peter 3:9).

Scoffers can claim that God is slack about the promise of his coming, but they do not understand. God is waiting because he **"is patient toward us, not wanting any to perish, but all to go forward to repentance."** He is waiting because when the end comes it will be too late for anyone to repent.

Once the end comes it will be followed by the great judgment day. And every soul who has not believed and obeyed Christ in this life will be cast into hell with the devil and the

demons. Their judgment will be fixed. No amount of repentance then will prevent their punishment.

Therefore, the Lord is patient toward us. Remember these words from the prophet Ezekiel about the people of Israel: **“Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit. For why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the lord Jehovah, therefore turn yourselves back, and live”** (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

## The world destroyed by fire

- **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).

Jesus gave many warnings about being prepared for the coming day of the Lord. For example, he said to his disciples, **“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.**

**“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 24:37-42). And Jesus continued that lesson by giving some parables about the importance of always being prepared.

Jesus gave a brief description of the end of the world after his disciples asked him about it (see for example, Matthew 24:26-31). And in this part of his book Peter adds to Jesus' description with his words about the world being destroyed by fire.

However, it is my belief that, although the materials and the energy of the world will be destroyed, they will not be wasted, because Paul said: **“For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not comparable to the glory that is going to be revealed for us. 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. 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 8:18-22).

Paul said the creation itself will be freed from the bondage of corruption. That suggests to me the intensely hot fire at the end of the world will be like the furnace of a refinery. The fire will purify the world and make it useful for the heavenly world; the elements will not be wasted; they will be transformed away from the materials as they are now.

Peter also said the heavens will pass away with a roar. A roar signals power and energy. For example, the roar of thunder is caused by the release of the great energy of lightning.

And the energy released by the disintegration of the elements of the world will happen with a roar.

## Anticipating the coming of the day of God

- **Therefore, all these things being disintegrated, what kind ought ye to be in holy actions and pieties, anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of God, by which the heavens, being made fiery hot, will be disintegrated, and the elements dissolve, being intensely hot?** (Second Peter 3:11-12).

If we want to escape that destruction by fire we must be righteous men in holy actions and pieties. We must become holy by the purification resulting from our redemption through Christ, because only he can purify us and make us holy. And we must live a life of piety with full commitment to the righteousness of God.

Instead of dreading the destruction at the end of the world, we should eagerly anticipate it as the coming of the day of God our heavenly Father bringing to us our eternal sonship. Peter also said we should hasten the coming of the day of God. To hasten means to cause to come quicker. But how can we cause the coming of the day of God to be quicker? I can only conjecture. Perhaps the more souls that are converted to Christ, the sooner the day of God will come.

This is the second time Peter spoke of the elements disintegrating being intensely hot. However, this time he also said the elements would dissolve. To dissolve means to liquefy. That suggests the world will be reduced to the way it was at the beginning: **“without form and void”** (Genesis 1:2), freed from its bondage to corruption, filled with energy (intense heat) and ready to be transformed into something fit for heaven.

## A new heavens and a new earth

- **But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells** (Second Peter 3:13).

God is preparing for us a new heavens and a new earth. And that is according to his promise. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles at the last supper: **“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 the most wonderful thing about that new heavens and new earth is that righteousness dwells there. There will never be any sin and wickedness, because it will be a place of only righteousness. And that is what makes it the very best. For the most magnificent heavens and earth would soon be transformed into a world of hell if sin and wickedness dwelt there.

Remember what Jesus said to the sinful scholars and Pharisees: **“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). Righteousness is what makes a place great and wonderful. Sin

and wickedness make a place like hell. Consider what Solomon said about life in this evil world: **“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred with it”** (Proverbs 15:17).

## Be diligent to be pure

- **Therefore, beloved, anticipating these things, be diligent to be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless** (Second Peter 3:14).

Being found by God in peace means being reconciled to him. And reconciliation can only come through faith and obedience to his Son Jesus Christ. As Paul said, **“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.**

**“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 5:8-11).

And when we are reconciled to God through Christ, we are made righteous without spot and blameless. Nevertheless remember, we can only remain in peace with God, without spot and blameless, if we remain faithful to Christ. Otherwise, we too will suffer the punishment of hell with the devil and the demons.

## Our beloved brother Paul

- **And consider the longsuffering of our Lord, salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all his letters, speaking in them about these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist, as also the other scriptures, to their own destruction** (Second Peter 3:15-16).

We should consider the longsuffering of our Lord, salvation, because without his longsuffering toward us we would never have been saved from the condemnation caused by our transgressions against him. Just think of what would happen if God cast us into hell immediately after we sin against him. Not one man would ever be saved. Hence, his longsuffering toward us is truly our salvation.

That lesson of our salvation through Christ is taught throughout the New Testament. And Peter mentions specifically the writings of our beloved brother Paul. Paul is the beloved brother of every disciple of Christ, just as Peter is, because we are all part of the body of Christ. We are a brotherhood of the children of God, and we love each other.

God gave Paul wisdom to teach us about the good news of Christ, just as he gave wisdom to Peter. Both of whom wrote about God and his will for us. God gave that wisdom to them through the inspiration of his Holy Spirit. That is why Peter could say that the things Paul wrote were scriptures. And the scriptures they wrote have been recorded for us in the New Testament of the Bible.

Peter said that some of the things Paul wrote are hard to understand. And anyone who reads the books of Paul can see how true that is. One of his books that contain many things difficult to understand is his letter to the Romans. Nevertheless, careful and diligent study of the entire Bible helps us understand the difficult parts.

Peter also told how the ignorant and the unstable twist some of the things that Paul wrote. They twist what he said by making false interpretations, not only of what Paul wrote but also of the other scriptures. And by so doing they lead many souls astray. One example is the false doctrine of salvation by faith only. Another is the false doctrine of once-saved-always-saved. Nevertheless, Peter said such men twist the scriptures to their own destruction. For God will judge every man who twists his holy word to say things that are false.

Such men do it to become popular. But remember what Jesus said about being popular: **“Woe when men will speak well of you, for their fathers did in the same way to the false prophets”** (Luke 6:26). And remember what Paul 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).

### Knowing in advance, keep watch

- **Ye therefore, beloved, knowing in advance, keep watch, lest, having accommodated to the error of the lawless, ye fall from your own steadfastness** (Second Peter 3:17).

Peter said that knowing those things in advance, we should keep watch. We should watch because we have been warned. Otherwise, we might accommodate to the error of the lawless, and fall from our steadfastness.

The lawless are those who live unrighteously. The error of the lawless is their wrongdoing. To accommodate to the error of the lawless means to compromise and tolerate their wrongdoing. And those who do, risk falling from their own steadfastness.

Being steadfast means being firm and established. What Peter means by falling from our own steadfastness is losing our values and convictions, and becoming morally and spiritually unstable and unreliable. Therefore, we should never accommodate to the error of the lawless. Being tolerant and accepting about their wrongdoing will drag us down. Therefore, we must continually keep watch about our faith and righteousness, and never be accepting of the wrongdoing of the lawless.

Peter warned about accommodating to the error of the lawless. Yet there are a few kinds of errors that we can accommodate to. For example, Jesus gave only one cause to justify divorce, but the Pharisees challenged what he said: **“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 19:3-8).

The Hebrews were not always a lawless people, but their hearts were always hardened about divorce. Therefore, in the law of Moses God accommodated to them about divorce (see Deuteronomy 24:1-2). And when the hearts of Christians become hardened about some errors, it may be necessary for us to accommodate to them. For example, modern Christians no longer require their women to have their heads covered during prayer. Their hearts are hardened about it, but I still have fellowship with them. Their error is not one of a lawless people.

## Grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ

- **But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him is the glory both now and into the day of the age. Truly** (Second Peter 3:18).

Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ means to continue growing spiritually. We should continue throughout our lives to develop our character and learn more about Christ and his will for us. Our bodies stop growing after our childhood. However, we can continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ throughout most of our lives. We can stop growing only when our bodies begin to fail us, or when we stop trying. And Peter urged us to never stop trying, but continue to grow.

Peter ended his book with a statement about the glory of Christ, saying that the glory is to him both now and into the day of the age. The glory is to Christ, whether the world recognizes it or not. But we who belong to him love him and honor him and give him the glory that belongs to him.

The expression **“into the day of the age”** in that passage probably refers to the time of the new heaven and earth. That will be a new day to begin a new age for us all.



## A Commentary on The First Letter of John

John's style of writing produces some passages that can be puzzling. They sometime almost seem to be riddles. For example, he said, **"I wrote these things to you, those who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that ... ye may believe in the name of the Son of God"** (First John 5:13). He wrote to those who believe, so that they may believe. Is that not a riddle? My purpose of this commentary is to try to help you understand the Bible as God has helped me understand.

Another important thing you need to know about the writings of John is that he uses the word sin in various ways. And unless you recognize how he is using that word in a particular context, he will seem to be contradicting himself. For example, he uses the word sin sometimes to refer to any offense against God, but he also uses the word sometimes to mean continual disobedience to him. Hence, he sometimes says we all sin, but he also says that we who belong to Christ do not sin and cannot sin.

### The Word of life

- **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** (First John 1:1-3).

Jesus Christ the Son of God was from the beginning of everything. For John said in his biography of Christ, **"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 is testifying in this book that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And John emphasizes his qualifications to testify by saying he was among those who hear him, who saw him with their eyes, who looked upon him, and who even touched him. John called Jesus the Word in his biography of him. In this book he called Jesus the Word of life.

Jesus is the Word of life, because it is through his word that we can have true life, eternal life. For Peter said that we the disciples of Christ, have been **"begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God that lives and remains into the age"** (First Peter 1:23). We were begotten again through the word of God. And Jesus is the Word, the Word of life.

John emphasizes the fact that the life, the eternal life (the Son of God) was made known. He was with the Father in heaven, and was made known to us by living in the world as a man. John says they saw him and they heard him. And what they saw and heard they

declare to us. They declare it to us so that we also may have fellowship with them, which fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. That means we can all have fellowship together with God and Christ.

John is emphasizing the awesomeness and the magnificence of knowing the Son of God himself, and being joined in fellowship with the very Creator God and his only begotten Son, together with all who believe and obey him.

## Writing these things to you

- **And we write these things to you, so that our joy may be made full** (First John 1:4).

For those who belong to Christ, it is not only a joy to have fellowship with the heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ, but it is a joy to share with others what we know of God and his will for us. Therefore, John said they wrote these things (the knowledge of the good news of Christ) so that their joy may be made full. Our joy as disciples of Christ cannot be made full without sharing with others what we know about him and his will for us.

## The message we heard from him

- **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 1:5).

Light symbolizes knowledge, truth, and wisdom. And the very nature of God is knowledge, truth, and wisdom. He is the very personification of light, having no darkness in him at all. Indeed, there is no knowledge, truth, and wisdom that he lacks. He knows everything that is, and everything that can happen. And he knows what is best for everything, including what is best for us. Therefore, we must trust and obey him if we want what is best for us—ultimately best, even in this dark world of sin. For 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).

That God is light without darkness, and that he has all knowledge, truth, and wisdom, is the message that John and the others heard from Christ, and what they declare to us. Their testimony (what they have written for us), which was inspired by God’s Holy Spirit and is contained in the New Testament, is filled with God’s knowledge, truth, and wisdom. Therefore, if you want to be guided by truth and light, study the words of their testimony.

## Walking in the light

- **If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from every sin** (First John 1:6-7).

What John means by walking in the darkness is living in sin. And any man who claims to have fellowship with Christ and lives in sin, lies and does not the truth. Truth is the will of

God for us, and righteousness is doing the truth. We cannot live in sin and still have fellowship with Christ.

Only if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, and live righteously according to the truth, do we have fellowship with him. And in the same way, we have fellowship with each other. Walking in the light, as he is in the light, is the only way for us to be united together and with him. Our obedience is absolutely required. And we learn how to be obedient by studying the message of Christ that has been recorded for us in the New Testament.

By walking in the light (living righteously), not only do we have fellowship with God and each other, but the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from every sin. The blood of Jesus cleanses us in a figurative sense. The blood of Jesus symbolizes his perfect life of obedience to the Father even to the point of death on a cross. And that earned him the right from the Father to redeem all who belong to him. That is how we are cleansed from every sin. He paid the price for us, and made us righteous and holy. Remember however, his cleansing power only works when we remain faithful to him.

## Confessing our sins

- **If we say that we have no sin, we lead ourselves astray, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous so that he will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us** (First John 1:8-10).

Having no sin means never having sinned, and no man can make that claim. Any man who says he has never sinned, leads himself astray, and the truth is not in him. However, by confessing our sins and obey his Son Jesus Christ, God is faithful and righteous so that he will forgive our sins. He will forgive them because Christ paid the price for us.

Moreover, God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That means through his Holy Spirit in us he will make us righteous. The Holy Spirit makes us righteous (1) through the knowledge of God's will for us, which is found in the Holy Bible, and (2) by his Holy Spirit within us, which will also make us righteous through our strengthened conscience.

Thus, by knowing God's will with our intellect, and wanting to obey it from our conscience, we will be cleansed from all unrighteousness. We will no longer want to be unrighteous. We will know how to live right, and we will want to live that way.

Also, by saying we have not sinned that makes God a liar, not literally of course, but by accusation. Any man who claims to be sinless is accusing God of being a liar, because God has said we have all sinned. As Paul said by the Holy Spirit, **"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ..."** (Romans 3:23). And men who make such claims of sinlessness do not have the word of God in them.

There are many men in the world who think they do not need to be redeemed by Christ. Since they do not consider themselves guilty before God, they believe they do not deserve being cast into hell. Such men are ignorant of the word of God. They do not have his word

in them. Therefore, it is our duty to try to teach those of them who will listen. That way they may repent and can then be reconciled to God.

## Christ is the atonement for our sins

- **My little children, I write these things to you so that ye may not sin. And if any man does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—righteous Jesus Christ. And he is the atonement for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world** (First John 2:1-2).

In the Bible, referring to a group of people as children is an expression of affection for them. For example, during the last supper, Jesus said to his apostles, **“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”** (John 13:33-35).

And after his resurrection, when he met some of them on the lake shore, this is part of what happened: **“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).

Using the expression little children seems to express a stronger and more personal affection. Jesus did not refer to the disciples in the boat as little children because they did not yet know who he was and might have been offended by that stronger expression of affection. Therefore, by calling us little children John is expressing his strong affection for us, for all those who believe in Christ. He loves us that way because Jesus said we should love each other, just as he loved us. And John said he was writing to us so that we may not sin.

No man can completely prevent another man from sinning. Nevertheless, by enlightening a man with the word of God that will help him. For there is a greater risk of sinning if we lack the knowledge and the encouragement we need to live right. By knowing the will of God for us, and by desiring to obey him, we will not sin.

However, as is taught throughout the New Testament, if a man does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, namely righteous Jesus Christ. An advocate is someone who speaks favorably for another man or for a group. And that includes those who may be accused. Jesus is our advocate with the Father, for us who believe and obey him.

John called him righteous Jesus Christ. He can be an advocate for us because he lived a perfectly righteous life on the earth. He lived in the world as we do, was tempted in all things as we are, went about doing good, and suffered and died innocently in complete obedience to his heavenly Father. His faith in God the Father, and his obedience to him, earned him the right to atone for the sins of those who belong to him. Therefore, he is the perfect advocate for us. Nevertheless remember, God will still chasten us when we offend him (see Hebrews 12:5-11).

John said that Jesus was the atonement for the sins of the whole world. To atone means to make amends for transgressions. Jesus atones for our sins by being our redeemer. God gave him the right to redeem every man from the condemnation of his sins. God gave him that right as a partial reward for his perfect obedience. Therefore, Jesus is the atonement for the sins of the whole world. Nevertheless, not every man will be redeemed, because not every man will believe and obey him. Christ will only redeem those who belong to him, which is only possible by our faith and obedience to him.

## How to know that we know him

- **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).

What John means by knowing Christ is belonging to him and having fellowship with him. And we can know that we belong to him and have fellowship with him, if we keep his commandments. To know Christ is the way to have the greatest comfort and encouragement, with the hope of eternal life. Therefore dear brother, keep his commandments, all of them, regardless of how unpopular they may be.

John said the man who says he knows Christ, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Those who champion the false doctrine of salvation by faith only and not of works, ignore such passages as these. The good news of Christ, as revealed to us in the New Testament, is filled with teachings about the absolute necessity of keeping his commandments, which includes doing good works.

John even said that the love of God was fully perfected in the man who keeps God's word. And that is how we know we are in him—by obeying him. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about keeping his commandments: **“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15). Love for God is perfected by obedience. Without obedience there is no love. And he who says otherwise is a liar and the truth is not in him.

If you want your love of God to be fully perfected in you, then keep his word, which means to obey his commandments. And that requires carefully study of his holy word, the Bible.

## Walk as that man walked

- **The man who claims to abide in him, he also ought so to walk just as that man walked** (First John 2:6).

John uses the word abide fifteen times in this book, while it is only used twice elsewhere in the New Testament. What John means by abiding in Christ is to be united with him under his headship. Walking the way Jesus walked means to live the kind of life he lived. Of course, that is not meant to be taken literally, because it cannot be done literally. Walking as Jesus walked means living righteously and fruitfully in whatever circumstance you may be.

Remember, Jesus only lived about thirty-three years in the world. And thirty of those years were spent living as a humble carpenter. Therefore, living and laboring humbly, obeying the commands of God, such as the ten commandments, wherever we may be, is walking as Jesus walked. Hence, whether you are a carpenter, or a truck driver, or a doctor, or a nurse, or a house-wife and mother, if you live righteously obeying God's commandments, then you are walking the way Jesus walked. And in that way you will abide in him.

## An old and a new commandment

- **Brothers, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment that ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that ye heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light now shines** (First John 2:7-8).

The old commandment that we have had from the beginning is that we love each other. For remember, Jesus said to his apostles at 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). That was a new commandment then, but it is an old commandment now.

And John said that commandment is the word that we heard from the beginning. We heard it from the beginning of our lives as disciples of Christ. We heard it from the beginning because it is a foundation of the good news of Christ.

When John said he was writing a new commandment to us, he was writing about that new commandment Jesus gave during the last supper. It was new then, but it is old now. It is old in the sense that it had been given many years in the past, even when Christ was still in the world.

John also said that old “new commandment” is true in him (Christ) and in us. The commandment that we love each other is certainly true in him, because Jesus also said, **“This is my commandment, that ye love each other, just as I have loved you”** (John 15:12). It is true that Christ loved us, and it is true of his genuine disciples that we love each other. Thus, love is true in Christ, and it is true in us who belong to him.

John said he wrote that new commandment to us **“because the darkness is passing away, and the true light now shines.”** What John meant by darkness is ignorance. And ignorance was passing away because the complete word of God was being written. Remember, the New Testament was in the process of being written when John wrote this book.

He also said the true light now shines, which means the complete word of God was being made available to the world. The true light, the knowledge of Christ and his good news for us, began shining at the beginning of his ministry. And it continued to increase until the complete word of God was written.

Paul also told how the knowledge of the good news of Christ is light, when he 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.**

**“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves are your bondmen through Jesus. Because it is God who said, Out of darkness light is to shine, who shone in our hearts for an enlightenment of the knowledge of the glory of God in the presence of Jesus Christ”** (Second Corinthians 4:3-6).

Scoffers refuse to believe in the good news of Christ, and so they deny it. They are like the rulers of the Jews who held their ears shut after Stephen rebuked them for persecuting the prophets of God. For the scripture says, **“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”** (Acts 7:54-58).

### Abiding in the light

- **He who claims to be in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and no cause of stumbling is in him. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness, and he goes about in the darkness, and knows not where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes** (First John 2:9-11).

When John speaks about hating and loving a brother, he is referring to the brotherhood of disciples of Christ, not to unbelievers. Our spiritual brothers are those who belong to Christ with us; they are children of God with us. Therefore, it is not a sin to hate a sinner. Indeed, there are some men who are so wicked that they should be hated.

God himself hates wicked men. Here are two passages that say it: **“Jehovah tries the righteous man, but his soul hates the wicked man and him who loves violence”** (Psalm 11:5), and, **“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).

Regarding light and darkness, they symbolize good and evil, as well as knowledge and ignorance. Being in the light means knowing the truth and living righteously. Being in the darkness means having ignorance of the will of God and living sinfully.

Therefore, what John is saying is that any man who claims he knows the truth and is living righteously, yet hates a fellow Christian, is actually ignorant of the will of God and is living sinfully. In contrast, the man who loves his fellow Christian genuinely, he knows the truth and is living righteously. Hence, no cause of stumbling is in him. That means his knowledge of the truth and his right living will keep him from falling away into unrighteousness.

The man who hates his fellow Christian is ignorant of the will of God. Such a man lives his life in that ignorance, and does not know where he is going. He does not know because

his ignorance has darkened his mind. Therefore dear brother, if you happen to hate a fellow Christian, one who remains in our fellowship and has not been formally shunned, then you are living in ignorance about God's will for us. Let not your hatred blind your eyes, because God will judge you.

## Forgiven through his name

- **I write to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you through his name** (First John 2:12).

This is now the second time John calls us little children. Indeed, in this book he refers to us seven times with that expression of strong affection. And we too should have the same feeling toward our brothers and our sisters in Christ, although it would not now in these times be wise to use that expression, because it would be misunderstood.

And here he assures us that our sins have been forgiven through his name, the name of Jesus Christ. This most guilty generation of Americans loves forgiveness. Indeed, they demand forgiveness, and condemn anyone who does not give it. And they have perverted the holy scriptures to justify their demand for forgiveness, complete forgiveness.

Nevertheless, true forgiveness can only come after repentance. And genuine repentance involves turning away from all evil, and seeking to make amends, producing fruit worthy of repentance. As John the immerser said to the Pharisees and the Sadducees who heard his message of repentance, **“Therefore produce fruit worthy of repentance”** (Matthew 3:8).

Notice also how John said our sins have been forgiven us through his name, the name of Christ. 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).

## Fathers, young men, children

- **I write to you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because ye have overcome evil. I write to you, children, because ye know the Father. I wrote to you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning. I wrote to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and ye have overcome evil** (First John 2:13-14).

In that passage the main thing John says is that the fathers (those of whom he is writing) have known him (Christ) from the beginning, and that the young men have overcome evil. When he speaks of children he was probably referring to them both, because he had earlier called us all little children.

When John said he was writing to fathers because they had known him (Christ) from the beginning, that means they had known the Savior from the time they first became his disciples. They knew Christ from the beginning because no man can become a disciple of Christ without knowing about him and willfully choosing him (see Hebrews 8:6-13).

John repeated those words to fathers, but the second time he said **“I wrote to you”** instead of **“I write to you.”** He no doubt repeated those words for emphasis. To use a modern expression, he said something like, “I am telling you and I told you.”

That seems to have been his way of warning against trying to make infants and young children become disciples of Christ. Trying to do that is a foolish error done to please their parents. No man can become a Christian without knowing the Lord from the beginning. In my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity* I explain how God cares for the souls of young children, without the need for human intervention.

John said he was writing to young men because they had overcome evil. John also repeated his words to young men, but the second time he also said **“I wrote to you”** instead of **“I write to you,”** as he had said to the fathers. He also added that they were strong, and the word of God abode in them.

The reason John repeated his words about young men overcoming evil was probably also for emphasis. He emphasized those things to young men because when we are young we are all the most vulnerable to evil. And in order to become a disciple of Christ a man must overcome evil; otherwise he can never be a disciple of Christ. Hence, young men who are faithful Christians have overcome evil. And John seems to have been proud of them because of it, and so should we.

John said the young men were strong. Young men are by nature physically strong. And overcoming evil indicates being strong in spirit. For it takes strength of character to resist the lusts of our flesh and overcome evil. Also John said that young men who are faithful disciples of Christ have the word of God abiding in them. We overcome evil both with our strength of character and our intellect. And our intellect is made strong with the word of God in us.

John said he was writing to us children because we know the Father. We who belong to Christ know the Father through our knowledge of Christ. Remember what Jesus said when Phillip ask him to show them 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).

He who knows the Son of God knows God the Father, because they are so united in spirit.

## Love not the world

- **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).

We can admire things in the world; we can want them; we can enjoy them. For Solomon said, **“I know that there is nothing better for them [all of us], than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor. It is the gift of God”** (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

He also 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).

Nevertheless, we must not love the world, nor the things in the world. We must not give them our highest value. For any man who loves the world, and gives it and the things in it his highest value does not have the love of the Father in him. We cannot even give our highest value to our dearest loved ones. For Jesus said, **“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 deserves our greatest love and our highest value because he created us, he knows what is best for us, and he even gave his life for us.

No man can love God the Father, valuing him most of all, if he loves the world and the things in it. And John gives another reason why in the next passage.

### Everything in the world

- **Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides into the age** (First John 2:16-17).

Lust refers to excessive and unrighteous desire. And the lust of the flesh includes things like illicit sexual pleasure, gluttony, drunkenness, sloth, and all such things that overindulge our body appetites and desires. The lust of the eyes include things like pornography and covetousness. The pride of life includes things like being overbearing, boastful, and aggressive.

Many sinful things include more than one of those three things that John listed. For example, fornication gives the thrill of illicit sexual pleasure, the pleasure of seeing the forbidden nakedness of someone of the opposite sex, and the morbid pleasure of the conquest of another person, of using their body.

Those evil things, the lust of the flesh, the lust of they eyes, and the pride of life, are of the world and not of the Father. God did not create the world that way. It has been corrupted by sin. Our very bodies are corrupted by sin, in both visible and invisible ways. I speak more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

But our world is transient; it will pass away with the lusts of it. Only men who are foolish about their spirit put their hope in this world and the things in it. Such fools act like beasts driven by their lusts and pride. Like the world itself, men who are foolish about their spirit will perish with the world, and will suffer eternal punishment in the second death of hell.

But we who do the will of God abide into the age; our spirit will never die. Remember what Jesus said about us: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). Into the age refers to the new age of the new heaven and earth after this one.

## Antichrist

- **Children, it is the last hour. And as ye heard that the antichrist comes, and now many antichrists have developed, from which we know that it is the last hour** (First John 2:18).

All kinds of extravagant theories about the antichrist have been made. However, the only places where the antichrist is mentioned in the Bible are here and in John's second letter. The antichrist is actually a kind of spirit or a mentality within a man that causes him to deny that Jesus was the Son of God. It is not the name of any one man.

A little farther in this letter John gives that definition: **"Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son"** (1Jo 2:22), and, **"... every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is that of the antichrist, which ye have heard that it comes, and is now in the world already"** (1Jo 4:3). John said the same thing in his second letter: **"Because many deceivers have gone forth into the world, those not acknowledging Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist"** (2Jo 1:7).

And that is all the Bible says about the antichrist. John made it very clear that what he meant by the antichrist was simply the spirit in any man who denies Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That spirit of denial grew as a reaction against the spread of faith in Christ. And John was warning his fellow Christians about it, fellow Christians he affectionately called children. As faith in Christ grows, so does the denial of him. Thus, **"many antichrists have developed,"** which simply means many men deny him.

The only creature who could be called "the antichrist" is a common spirit or mentality in the minds of men that denies Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. And the world is now filled with men who have such a spirit in them. The world is filled with them because knowledge about Christ has filled most of the world. There has never been, nor will there ever be, any one man of flesh who is *the* antichrist.

The matter about it being the last hour, probably refers to the last period in the development of the church and the New Testament. That "hour" symbolizes the time of the apostles when the church was established and the New Testament was being written. And it was a time of transition, which involved the passing away of the law of Moses. As the author of the book of Hebrews said, the law of Moses was **"becoming old and obsolete is near disappearance"** (Hebrews 8:13). It was also the time when Gentiles were added to the church. Thus, the last part of that time of transition was called the last hour. And it was during that time, when the church grew rapidly, that the opposing antichrists became many, being simply those who deny him.

## Not of us

- **They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they were of us, they would have continued with us, but—so that they might be made known, that they are not all of us** (First John 2:19).

Remember what Jesus said to the Jews who were opposing him: **“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. 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 10:25-28).

We who genuinely believe in Christ, and faithfully obey him are his sheep. But not all who are with us are of us. That means some who claim to believe and obey him are not genuine, not his true sheep. For when Paul warned the elders of the congregation at Ephesus, he said, **“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).

Such grievous wolves, and those who follow them and remain with them, are not of us; they are not genuine sheep of Jesus. Therefore, they go out from us. They may stay in the same place, but spiritually and doctrinally they go out from us. Those who are genuine among us no longer fellowship together with them because they departed from the true church of Christ.

John says they never were a real part of us, never true sheep of Christ. Many people will become part of a group only because they are seeking things such as fellowship and belonging. The predatory ones will join a group to seek victims. And that sometimes happens in the churches. Such spiritually unconverted sinners are not truly of us. And those who go out from us, forsaking the true Christ, are of that kind, not genuinely being of us.

John says that if they were of us, they would have continued with us. If they were true sheep of Christ, genuinely converted in their hearts, they would not then have denied the authentic Christ and gone out from us. They separate from us so that they might be exposed as not being truly of us. Whatever was the particular reason for their going out, the effect was to make them known that they are not of us.

Now that does not mean none of us would ever backslide for a time, because Jesus spoke of seeking lost sheep. Thus, we need to be very careful and not label a former member as permanently not of us. Their actions will eventually expose them, whether they are truly of us or not.

## An anointing from the Holy

- **And ye have an anointing from the Holy, and ye know all the things** (First John 2:20).

Anointing as described in the Bible uses oil (usually olive oil) for two reasons. One is simply to give comfort and healing to the body. The other reason is to indicate being chosen and appointed for a special purpose. The tabernacle and all of its furnishings were anointed before being used. The priests were all anointed before serving. The kings were anointed as a sign of being chosen.

The word christ is a transliteration of the Greek word that means anointed. Messiah is a transliteration of the Hebrew that means anointed. When the Jews spoke of Jesus as the Christ, they were referring to God’s special anointed.

The beautiful second psalm describes how the Son of God is his anointed: **“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 anointing mentioned here by John refers to the disciples of Christ being anointed as a royal priesthood. Remember what Peter said about that: **“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).

Our immersion in water for the remission of our sins is a kind of anointing, a figurative anointing. Becoming a disciple of Christ means we have been appointed to serve him and his church.

John also says our anointing is from the Holy. There is only one Holy, and that is God. Remember what Jesus said to the man who called him good teacher: **“Why do thou call me good? There is none good except one, God”** (Matthew 19:17). Likewise there is only one Holy, *the Holy*—God the Father. And it is he from whom we have our anointing.

When John says we know all things, he simply meant we knew everything necessary for our anointing to serve Christ and his church. We know all the necessary things we need to know. Otherwise, we would not be disciples, because to be a disciple we must know all the necessary things. And those things are not complex and detailed.

## Knowing the truth

- **I wrote to you not because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth** (First John 2:21).

Remember, in the Bible the word truth refers to knowledge of God and his will for us. John did not write this letter to introduce us to Christ and his good news. He wrote it because we have already learned about Christ and his will for us. Hence, John was writing about things beyond the fundamentals because we are ready for more advanced learning about the truth of God and his will for us.

The world is filled with lies and false ideas. But no lie is of the truth. No lie is found in the knowledge of God and his will for us. There is nothing in the word of God that is false.

Scoffers, including those who are scholars and men of learning, commonly accuse the Bible of containing myths, lies, and contradictions. But they are the liars, because no lie is of the truth. They speak in their ignorance and faithlessness. Believe them not because scoffers and unbelievers will inherit the lake of fire with the devil and the demons.

### Who is the liar

- **Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. Every man who denies the Son, also does not have the Father (First John 2:22-23).**

Scoffers and unbelievers are the liars, because they deny that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. Each man who denies that Jesus is the Son of God and his anointed, is an antichrist. And collectively they are *the* antichrist that John speaks about.

Hence, every man who denies Jesus the Son of God, does not have the Father. That means such men do not belong to him, and have no hope in him.

### Heard from the beginning

- **Therefore ye, let what ye heard from the beginning abide in you. If what ye heard from the beginning abides in you, ye also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he promised us: the eternal life (First John 2:24-25).**

What we heard from the beginning were the necessary fundamentals about God and his will for us. And John urges us to let that abide in us, because when it does then we also will abide in the Son and in the Father. That means if we integrate our knowledge of the fundamentals of God and his will for us, making them a part of our thinking and our living, then we will be a part of God and Christ. We will belong to him in his kingdom as his children. We will even be part of the body of Christ, which is his church.

And he has given us a promise. When we abide in him, belonging to him in his kingdom as his children, then he has promised us the eternal life. Not eternal life in this vain, sinful, and trouble filled world, but eternal life in the perfect world of heaven with him where righteousness dwells. What could be a greater promise than that?

### Those who lead you astray

- **I wrote these things to you concerning those who lead you astray (First John 2:26).**

Those who lead astray include (1) men with the spirit of antichrist, who deny that Jesus is the Son of God, and (2) men who are not of us, meaning counterfeit disciples. There are many people who are led astray from the truth of God by such men.

The only way to remain faithful to the will of God is through knowledge of his word, which is now contained in the Holy Bible. That is one reason those who lead people astray

discourage them from reading and studying the Bible. If they cannot prevent people from reading it, they try to confuse them by their perverted interpretations of it.

Beware of trusting your soul to anything but God and his truth. Study the Bible as if your life depends upon it, because it does. Remember, the word of God will judge us in the last day, because Jesus said, **“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).

## The anointing ye received

- **And for you, the anointing that ye received from him abides in you, and ye have no need that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is no lie, and just as it taught you, ye will abide in him** (First John 2:27).

John said earlier that we have an anointing from the Holy. Remember, being anointed is a sign of being chosen and appointed for a special purpose. And we received our anointing (figuratively) when we became a disciple of Christ. That anointing means we were appointed by him to be separate from the world, and to serve him. And John said that anointing abides in us.

Consider Jesus' apostles. He chose them to follow him by inviting them. And when they accepted his invitation, they began to serve him. That was how they received their anointing, not with oil, but by being chosen for a purpose. In a similar way, Jesus invites us to follow him, not as his apostles, but as his disciples. And by accepting his invitation we receive his anointing, which means being chosen for the purpose of serving him.

Remember how Peter spoke of us as a chosen people: **“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).

And that anointing, that appointment to serve him, abides in us. It abides in us in the sense of our knowing his will and wanting to serve him. Therefore, as John said, we have no need that any man teach us, because the same anointing teaches us. Our anointing, our having learned about Christ and having chosen to follow him continues to teach us about all things, meaning about all we need to know to fulfill our appointment to serve him.

What we learned of him, in order to be anointed and receive our appointment, is true and is no lie. The word of God found in the Holy Bible is called truth because it is true and is no lie. Let not unbelievers and scoffers, regardless of how much worldly education they may have received, let them not lead you astray from believing the Bible, because it is true and is no lie.

Our knowledge of his will and our desire to please him is what taught us and continues to teach us all we need to know to serve him. And in that way we will abide in him; we will remain in his kingdom as part of the body of Christ.

Of course, that does not mean we do not need to keep learning many things as we live our lives. It means we know how he wants us to live and serve him. Not in any specific way,

but in the general ways of truth and righteousness, which is the restricted way that Jesus said leads to life (see Matthew 7:14).

## Abide in him

- **And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is made known, we may have confidence, and not be shamed by him at his coming** (First John 2:28).

Jesus will be made known to the world when it ends and at the day of judgment. The world does not know him now because they do not believe in him. On the day the world ends and at the day of judgment they will believe in him. They will believe in him because he will manifest his mighty power. However, it will be too late for them then. They will no longer have the opportunity to repent and be redeemed.

In contrast we who believe in him now, and abide in him by remaining faithful disciples, will have confidence when he is made known to all. And as John said, we will not be shamed by him at his coming. Those who deny him and disobey him now will be shamed by him at his coming. They will be shamed by him because they denied and disobey him. They will be shamed by him because all of their sins will be exposed.

They will also be shamed by him because they will stand naked before him. When Paul was describing the difference between our bodies on earth and those in heaven, he said, **“For also in this we groan, longing to clothe ourselves with our habitation from heaven, if indeed also having put it on we will not be found naked”** (Second Corinthians 5:2-3). The unrepentant sinners will be found naked. They will be shamed and ashamed.

## Doing righteousness

- **If ye know that he is righteous, know ye that every man doing righteousness has been begotten of him** (First John 2:29).

Learning about Jesus Christ will prove to any reasonable man that Jesus is righteous. And the only way to learn the truth about him is through the words of the Holy Bible. It contains four biographies of him (primarily about the time of his ministry) that were written by four different men, each of which show how righteous he was. And the remaining parts of the New Testament also contain testimonies about his righteousness. Therefore, knowing that he is righteous, we can know that every man doing righteousness has been begotten of him.

There are two ways we are begotten of God. The first is when we were conceived in our mother’s womb. For Adam received of God’s spirit when he was created: **“And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul”** (Genesis 2:7). And we inherit from that spirit when we begin life in our mother’s womb.

Therefore, at the beginning of our lives we are all begotten of his Spirit, giving us all a pure and undefiled spirit in his image. However, when we sin against him we lose our son-

ship and need to be begotten again. 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 the 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).

When John said **“... know ye that every man doing righteousness has been begotten of him,”** that means no man can do righteousness without being begotten of him. For we cannot please God—doing righteousness—without belonging to his Son Jesus Christ. And the way we belong to him is to be begotten of him. That happens when we are immersed in water for the remission of our sins. That is how we are begotten from the Spirit. And when that happens Jesus redeems us from the condemnation of our sins, making us righteous before God, and living righteously in his kingdom.

Now regarding those who lived before Christ, or who are otherwise ignorant of his command for us to be begotten of him, remember what Jesus said about such ignorance: **“And Jesus said, For judgment I came into this world, so that those not seeing might see, and those who see might become blind. 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 9:41).

Therefore, those ignorant of Jesus’ commands are not held guilty of not obeying them. They will be judged differently. I speak more about that under the heading “Sinless because of ignorance” in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Called children of God

- **Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we may be called children of God** (First John 3:1).

Being begotten again from the Spirit (God’s Holy Spirit) makes us children of God again (we lose our original sonship when we first sin). And that fabulous privilege is a result of the love the Father has for us. It was because of God’s love that he sent his only begotten Son into the world. As 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).

And when we believe and obey the Son, then God adopts us as his own children. Paul wrote about that, when he said, **“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).

## The world does not know

- **Because of this the world does not know you, because it did not know him** (First John 3:1).

John told how the world did not know the Son of God. John called him the true light, because he brought truth into the world. Yet the world did not know him. As John said in his biography of Jesus, **“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).

And because the world did not know him, it does not know us. The world does not know us in the sense of knowing that we are children of God. How does the world treat the children of the rich and the powerful? They treat them well. We are the children of Almighty God, and yet they persecute us. They persecute us because they do not know us as the children of God; they do not recognize and acknowledge us as children of God.

Nevertheless, if the Bible is true then we are his children. And I have absolutely no doubt it is true. It has proven itself to me beyond doubt. Only God could have written a book filled with such truth and wisdom, including truth and wisdom about justice and righteousness, which is so far above the best the world has to offer. I can now no more doubt God and his holy Bible than I can doubt my own existence.

## We will see him as he is

- **Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is** (First John 3:2).

John here is speaking of our resurrection and our new life in heaven. As children of God we will be like the Son of God in heaven. We will have imperishable bodies as he has, because John said we will be like him.

Paul also spoke of the grandeur of our resurrection, when he said, **“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in the perishable, it is raised in imperishability. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power”** (First Corinthians 15:42-43). Our resurrection will be with imperishability, with glory, and with power.

In his great vision of heaven, John described seeing Jesus in his heavenly body: **“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 the sight of him was as the sun shines in its strength”** (Revelation 1:13-16).

And here in this book John says **“that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.”** Therefore, in heaven we too will have a powerful and awesome body that is imperishable, because it will be like the one he has. For John said, **“... we will be like him.”**

Notice how John says we *know* we will be like him, not we *believe* we will be like him. Dear reader, knowing and believing, faith and knowledge, are part of a continuum. As our faith in something increases we can begin to say we know it; our faith about it changes to knowledge.

Nevertheless, that change can work for good or for evil. For example, faith in the theory of the evolution of species has caused some scientists to say that evolution is a fact. We who believe in God’s holy word know better. We know the theory of the evolution of species is a lie because it denies the testimony of God our Creator.

Jesus said, **“And wisdom is justified from her children”** (Matthew 11:19). The children of wisdom are the consequences of it. And the consequences alone of faith in evolution have proven how false and evil it is. For example, Adolph Hitler justified his evil actions by his faith in social Darwinism (also called social evolution), which is the application of evolution theory to races and nations. That false theory has bred enormous evils.

We *know* that whenever Jesus is made known we will be like him, because our faith in him is so strong that it has become knowledge. And that knowledge has proven itself by all the good works it has produced, and continues to produce. For Jesus also said, **“And wisdom is justified from all her children”** (Luke 7:35). Wisdom is proven by its consequences.

## Purifying ourselves

- **And every man who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as that man is pure** (First John 3:3).

Therefore, we who have this great hope in us, we must purify ourselves, just as he is pure. That means we must purge ourselves of all spiritual uncleanness, and continually keep ourselves clean from the filthiness of sin.

Remember what Jesus said when he was criticized for eating with unwashed hands: **“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 15:17-20).

Those things Jesus mentioned are the kinds of things we must purify ourselves of, if we want to keep the hope we have to be like him in the afterlife.

## Sin is lawlessness

- **Every man doing sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness** (First John 3:4).

In this world there is both good and evil. Good results in life and development, while evil results in death and destruction. The purpose of laws is to promote good and oppose evil. The Holy Bible contains many laws that God has given man to promote good and oppose evil, and when they are obeyed righteousness occurs. And as Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

Laws serve both to instruct about what is good and evil, and to control behavior with rewards and punishments. Only a few laws are needed for those who love truth and righteousness and have wisdom about it. That is why we the disciples of Christ are under the law of liberty with God. Elaborate legal systems are needed for those who are of a rebellious spirit, and who love sin and wickedness. There is much I have written about laws and their applications in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Sin is the violation of God’s will, and that is lawlessness. Therefore, every man doing sin does lawlessness, whether he is a lawbreaker in the eyes of men or not. For there are many human laws that are against the will of God. And there are many laws of God that are against the will of man. Nevertheless, men who are lawless in the eyes of God will be condemned by him and punished, even though the world may not.

## He came to take up our sins

- **And ye know that that man was made known so that he might take up our sins. And in him is no sin** (First John 3:5).

The Son of God will be known to the entire world when it ends and at the day of judgment afterward. The Son of God was made known to those who love truth and righteousness when he came into the world. However, the world as a whole did not know him. Their eyes were blinded to him because they loved evil. And that has not changed.

The Son of God was made known in the world so that he might take up our sins. That means he came here so that he could atone for our sins and become our Redeemer. He took up our sins by paying the price for them. He paid the price by his life of perfect obedience to God. Being without sin enabled him to qualify to take up our sins, and pay the debt for them by becoming our Redeemer.

It is a terrible error to say that Jesus was made guilty with all of our sins so that he could suffer the punishment of them. It is a terrible slander against God to say that he punished his innocent Son because of our guilt. That is a great misinterpretation. Jesus took up our sins because he was sinless, not because he was sinful. I once heard (via closed caption on TV) a popular televangelist say that Jesus became the worse sinner in the world by taking all of our sins upon himself. What a horribly misguided accusation.

Jesus never became a sinner for any reason. It was the evil rulers of the Jews who made him a sinner and a criminal in their eyes. I speak more about how Jesus took up our sins in my commentary on Second Corinthians 5:21.

## Sinning and not sinning

- **Every man abiding in him does not sin. Every man who is sinning has not seen him, nor has known him** (First John 3:6).

We cannot abide in Christ and still live a sinful life. Indeed, John said that no man who lives a sinful life has ever seen him or known him. John is not speaking about having seen Jesus in the flesh, because only a limited number of people ever saw Jesus while he lived here upon the earth. John is speaking about having seen the Spirit of Jesus. And that is not done with our eyes.

We see his Spirit from what we learn about him in the Bible. We learn about the kind of man he was, the kind of character he had, the way he thought and acted, how he felt about other people and how he treated them. And we learn about the kind of relationship he has with God the Father.

That is how we see him, and how we know him. And no man who lives a sinful life ever learns about him that way. Remember what Jesus said about being able to see him: **“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).

## Doing righteousness

- **Little children, let no man lead you astray. He who is doing righteousness is righteous, just as that man is righteous** (First John 3:7).

What John says here is that, regardless of what any man may claim or what people may say about him, only the man who is living righteously is righteous. The true judge of a man is how he lives, not his words or his popularity. Many people have been led astray by judging a man by his words and his popularity instead of by his life. John is here warning us not to be led astray that way.

The only reliable way to judge a man is by how he lives. That way we can identify those who are genuinely righteous. And that is how we know that Jesus Christ is righteous. The witnesses who wrote about him in the Bible all testified of how he lived. And he did

indeed live righteously. He lived more righteously than any other man who ever lived or ever will live, because he is the only begotten Son of God.

## The devil sinned from the beginning

- **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).

The word devil means false accuser or slanderer. The word satan means adversary or enemy. The creature called the devil and Satan is God's great enemy and our great enemy who continually accuses falsely.

Sin is any offense or transgression against God and his righteousness. John said the devil sinned from the beginning. That does not mean God created him that way. It means he sinned when he made himself the devil and Satan. And he continues to sin; he continues to oppose God as an adversary to him.

John also said that those who are doing sin are of the devil. That means sinners are working with him and belong to him. They are part of his kingdom just as the demons are part of the devil's kingdom. Sinners are the devil's disciples in his war against God, whether they know it or not. And unless they repent, they will end up in hell with him.

John said that the Son of God was made known so that he might destroy the works of the devil. The Son of God was made known when he came into the world to live as Jesus Christ. What John means by the works of the devil is his opposition to truth and righteousness. The Son of God came into the world to promote truth and righteousness, and destroy the devil's opposition to them.

The sinless life of Christ did defeat the devil and destroyed his works in heaven, but it still took a war there to cast him out: **“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”** (Revelation 12:7-9).

Nevertheless, the works of the devil are not yet destroyed in the world. God is allowing the devil and his disciples to sin against him and continue his opposition here. Therefore, there is still much spiritual darkness and unrighteousness in the world. That great spiritual war continues here upon the earth. And it is our duty to use the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, to fight with the Son of God against the devil and his works.

## Not doing sin

- **Every man who has been begotten of God does not sin, because his seed abides in him. And he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God** (First John 3:9).

Remember, we are begotten in the spirit from the Holy Spirit of God when we repent of our sins and are immersed in water for the remission of them. That way we enter into the kingdom of God. As Jesus said, **“If any man is not begotten from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

And having been begotten of God that way we cannot sin. That does not mean we can never commit any kind of transgression against him. It means whatever occasional transgression we may commit is not called sin. It is not a crime against him that condemns us. Having been begotten of God that way makes us children of God. And a Father does not condemn and reject his children when they occasionally offend him.

That is what John means when he says we cannot sin. We cannot offend God in a way that he will condemn and reject us. Only if we forsake him completely will he condemn and reject us.

God will chasten us when we offend him, but he will not condemn us. For 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? And if ye are without chastening, of which all have become participants, then ye are bastards, and not sons.**

**“Besides, we indeed have had chastisers—the fathers of our flesh—and we were turned around. Shall we not much more be subordinate to the Father of the spirits, and we will live? For those men indeed for a few days chastened us according to that which seemed good to them, but he for that which is advantageous, in order to be partakers of his holiness. But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:5-11).

There is another sense in which we cannot sin. We cannot live sinfully when we have the Holy Spirit in us. We who have been begotten of God and are his children do not live in sin. John said we do not sin because his seed abides in us. Remember what Peter said about that seed: **“Ye should love each other fervently from a pure heart, begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God that lives and remains into the age”** (First Peter 1:22-23).

That incorruptible seed is the Holy Spirit of God, from which we are begotten. As disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit abides in us, and it is from the Holy Spirit that we have the word of God by which we live righteously. Having the Holy Spirit in us—with our knowledge of the word of God and our desire to obey him—we do not live sinfully.

If a disciple does live sinfully, God’s Holy Spirit will depart from him, and he is no longer considered a child of God. The same thing will happen to him as those who turn to the law of Moses for salvation. For Paul said, **“Ye were discharged from the Christ, ye who are made righteous by law. Ye have fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:4).

## Children of God and children of the devil

- **By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil** (First John 3:10).

A father is someone who produces offspring in his image, being made like him. We are children of God in our spirits. We were begotten from his Spirit, and are made like him in our spirits. We are like him in our spirits by the way we think and the way we act. We become children of God by obeying him and accepting his Spirit in our hearts. We allow the Spirit of God to operate in us, and we obey him by promoting truth and righteousness.

Unrepentant sinners are children of the devil in their spirits. They are like him in their spirits by the way they think and the way they act. They become children of the devil by obeying him and accepting his spirit in their hearts. They allow his spirit to operate in them, and they obey him by opposing truth and righteousness.

Remember what Jesus said to the Jews who were opposing him: **“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 8:4-45).

## Not of God

- **Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother** (First John 3:10).

Not doing righteousness means not being obedient to the will of God, but instead living a sinful life. And every man living that way is not of God. Nor will he ever be unless he repents and does righteousness before it is too late.

John also said that a man who is not loving his brother is not of God. That seems to mean that a man can believe in Christ and behave rightly, but if he does not love his brother in Christ he is not of God.

Thus, there are two things that will keep a man from being of God: (1) not doing righteousness, and (2) not loving his (Christian) brother. But you might ask, not loving which brother? Every one of them, as long as they remain faithful to Christ. We are obligated to love each of our Christian brothers just as much as we are obligated to do righteousness.

Only if a brother forsakes Christ and lives wickedly can we stop loving him, just as the other apostles no longer loved Judas Iscariot after he betrayed Jesus. And remember how Jehovah said about his people ancient Israel that he would love them no more: **“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).

## What we heard from the beginning

- **Because this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love each other. Not as Cain. He was of the wicked, and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were wrong, and his brother's right** (First John 3:11-12).

Remember the new commandment Jesus gave 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”** (John 13:34). And that commandment is a fundamental part of the good news of Christ. Hence, it is what we have heard from the beginning, from the first time we learned about Christ.

Loving each other is not like Cain. John said Cain was of the wicked, The wicked, meaning the devil and his ways. And being of the wicked, Cain murdered his brother. Remember that story: **“And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from Jehovah. And again she bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.**

**“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering to Jehovah of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offering, but he did not have respect to Cain and to his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. And Jehovah said to Cain, Why are thou angry? And why has thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou do not well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire shall be for thee, and thou shall rule over it.**

**“And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him. And Jehovah said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?”** (Genesis 4:1-9).

Cain had no love for his brother Abel. Instead of loving Abel, Cain murdered him because Abel pleased God and he did not. He murdered his brother because his own works were wrong. God is impartial, and he will have respect to every man who does what is right. Jehovah did not have respect to Cain and his offering because it was the wrong kind. Remember, Jehovah said to him, **“If thou do well, shall thou not be accepted?”**

## Marvel not if the world hates you

- **Marvel not, my brothers, if the world hates you** (First John 3:13).

During the time of the last supper Jesus told his apostles how the world hates him and hates us, when he said to them, **“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).

And Jesus gave the reason why the world hates him: **“The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil”** (John 7:7). Therefore, my brothers, we should not marvel if the world hates us.

## Passing out of death into life

- **We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who is not loving the brother abides in death. Every man hating his brother is a man-killer. And ye know that no man-killer has eternal life abiding in him** (First John 3:14-15).

We who have been begotten from the Spirit of God have passed out of death into life. For Jesus said, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). Our spirit will not see death, because it has passed out of death into life. It passed out of death because Jesus redeemed all who belong to him from the condemnation of our sins.

John said that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Our redemption from death is not because we love each other. It is because we obey Christ. And loving each other is part of that obedience.

When John said that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers, he was emphasizing the absolute necessity of our love for each other. For he said that he who is not loving the brother abides in death. Hence, it is impossible to pass out of death into life without loving each other.

John even said that every man hating his (Christian) brother is a man-killer. A man-killer is simply another name for a murderer. As with every other kind of sin, there are murderers who are unrepentant, and murderers who repent and follow Christ. Regarding the penalty of murder, immediately after the flood God commanded mankind to apply the death penalty to murderers (see Genesis 9:6). That means repentance will not save a man's life. It may save his soul, but he will still deserve to die because of his guilt.

God commanded the death penalty for man-killers. John says that every man who hates his brother is a man-killer. And that means he deserves the death penalty. Hence, no such man has eternal life abiding in him, because he will get the death penalty for his soul. Of course, if a man repents and stops hating his brother, then God will forgive him as he does with all our transgressions.

By saying these things, John is emphasizing the absolute necessity that we love each other. And that means loving each other with both our feelings and our actions, even to the point of giving our lives for them, as John says next.

## Knowing love

- **By this we know love, because that man laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers** (First John 3:16).

Jesus proved his great love for us by sacrificing his life for us so that we could live. Remember what he said to his disciples just before his betrayal and crucifixion: **“Greater**

love has no man than this, that some man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). And that is what Jesus did for us.

Notice how Jesus did not say he was laying down his life for all mankind. He was laying it down for his friends. And John said **“we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”** He did not say we ought to lay down our lives for all men, because all men are not our brothers. It would be foolish to say that men like the rulers of the Jews who crucified our Lord, were our brothers. Jesus died for his sheep, not for the children of the devil.

Of course, laying down our lives for the brothers should not be taken literally, except in very rare circumstances. Laying down our lives includes sacrificing some things about us for their sakes. It has the same general meaning as these words of our Savior: **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 16:25).

### Seeing a brother having need

- **But whoever has the world’s living, and sees his brother having need, and closes his bowels from him, how does the love of God abide in him?** (First John 3:17).

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to give to the poor and needy. Indeed, the law of Moses included several commands to provide for the poor, such as this one: **“When thou reap thy harvest in thy field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, thou shall not go again to fetch it. It shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless, and for the widow, that Jehovah thy God may bless thee in all the work of thy hands.**

**“When thou beat thine olive tree, thou shall not go over the boughs again. It shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gather of thy vineyard, thou shall not glean it behind thee. It shall be for the sojourner, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shall remember that thou were a bondman in the land of Egypt. Therefore I command thee to do this thing”** (Deuteronomy 24:19-22).

John says a miserly man does not have the love of God abiding in him. For God is the most generous of all. Moses also wrote about that, when he said, **“For Jehovah your God, he is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty, and the awesome, who regards not persons, nor takes a bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the sojourner in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the sojourner, for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt”** (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). I speak more about generosity in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World*.

Notice however, that John is speaking about helping our brothers. We are not obligated to give to everyone who may have need, because there are people in need who do not deserve our help. Remember what Jesus said about indiscriminate 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). And 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).

## Love in deed and in truth

- **My little children, we should not love in word, nor with the tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before him** (First John 3:18-19).

Generosity to a brother in need is showing our love in deed and in truth. Regarding the use of words, Solomon said that words can be very powerful: **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it shall eat the fruit of it”** (Proverbs 18:21). However, words alone accomplish nothing. The power of words is to stimulate action in others. Therefore, to only love in word or with the tongue is no love at all.

Remember what James said about faith without works: **“And if a brother or sister may be unclothed, and may be destitute of daily food, and some man of you would say to them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and fed, but ye would not give them the things necessary for the body, what is the benefit?”** (James 2:15-16).

John said that by loving in deed and in truth, then we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before him. To love in deed means to love with actions. To love in truth means to love genuinely, without hypocrisy.

And we know that we are of the truth when we do love in deed and in truth. Being of the truth means being of Christ our Lord, because he said about himself, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6).

And by loving in deed and in truth, and knowing that we are of the truth, will assure our hearts before him. We know God and Christ by our faith. And we can know that we belong to them by loving in deed and in truth. And knowing that will encourage us to love in deed and in truth. Our obedience that way will assure our hearts before him.

## If our heart should condemn us

- **Because if our heart should condemn us, that God is greater than our heart, and knows all things** (First John 3:20).

When our conscience is strong then our past sins and guilt before God can sometimes weigh heavily upon us and cause our heart to condemn us. For example, the heart of Peter no doubt condemned him after he denied Jesus. Peter denied him three times after Jesus was arrested.

Jesus had prophesied he would because Peter disputed with him. Here is how it happened: **“But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee. 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 26:32-35).

After Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to Peter and some of the other apostles on a beach. During which time Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep. Here is part of what was said: **“He [Jesus] 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 21:17).

Notice how Peter humbly said to Jesus, **“Lord, thou know all things.”** He no longer disputed with Jesus. And Jesus certainly forgave Peter for having denied him. Yet I am persuaded Peter’s heart continued to condemn him for his denial. But he knew that God is greater than our heart, and that Jesus forgave him.

Paul called himself the foremost of sinful men because he had persecuted the church: **“Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinful men, of whom I am foremost. But because of this I obtained mercy, so that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life”** (First Timothy 1:15-16).

Paul’s heart condemned him because of his guilt, but he knew that he had obtained mercy through Christ. Paul obtained mercy because God is greater than our hearts. He will forgive us even if we do not forgive ourselves. He will forgive us if we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. God overrules the condemnation of our hearts, and forgives us our transgressions, when we believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

## Having confidence toward God

- **Beloved, if our heart should not condemn us, we have confidence toward God, and whatever we may ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do things pleasing in his sight** (First John 3:21-22).

Not all of us have denied Christ or persecuted the church. Nevertheless, we have all sinned in some ways, more or less, but not all of us have hearts that condemn us. For those who have hearts that condemn them, God is greater than their hearts and forgives them, overruling their condemnation. Both Peter and Paul knew that God had forgiven them. Therefore, they no longer condemned themselves, although they never forgot their transgression.

Therefore, if our heart should not condemn us, whether it had in the past or not, John said we have confidence toward God. That means we have hope in his great promises for us. It also means we can have confidence that he will answer our prayers. He will answer them because we keep his commandments and do things pleasing in his sight. And the things pleasing in his sight are acts of righteousness and our love for each other.

Therefore, whatever we may ask we receive of him. Remember however, whatever we ask must be according to his will. That means it must be about things that are good and right and just, as well as wise in his sight.

## Keeping his commandments

- **And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love each other, just as he gave command** (First John 3:23).

Near the time of his ascension into heaven, Jesus gave this command to his disciples: **“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).

Although Jesus gave that command, it was God’s commandment for them. For as far back as the time of Moses, God commanded that we should believe in his Son Jesus Christ. (Believing in the name of Christ simply means believing in him, because a man’s name is his identity.)

Jehovah told Moses that God’s Son would be a prophet who would speak in God’s name (although God did not identify to Moses that prophet as his Son): **“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). That was God’s commandment that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

Moreover, it is God’s commandment that we love each other. Remember, Jesus said, **“This is my commandment, that ye love each other, just as I have loved you”** (John 15:12). That too was a commandment from God, because Jesus also said, **“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).

## Abiding in him

- **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).

Notice the emphasis on keeping God’s commandments. It is not the man who only believes in Christ who abides in him. It is the man that keeps his commandments who abides in him. The popular doctrine of salvation by faith only is a false one. And this is just one of many passages of scripture that shows how false that doctrine is.

John said that we know God abides in us from the Spirit that he gave us. That spirit is called the Holy Spirit, and it was given to us when we repented of our sins and were immersed in water for the remission of them. That is the gift of the Holy Spirit that Peter spoke about, when he said 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).

That gift is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For remember how Paul spoke of that: **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (First Corinthians 3:16).

The Holy Spirit is a living force of energy within our hearts and minds. It is active within our intellect by our knowledge of the word of God, and it is active in our feelings by its influence on our conscience. Hence, we know that he abides in us by the living knowledge we have of his word in our minds, and by the desire we have in our hearts to obey him and live righteously.

Our awareness of that energizing force in us, his Holy Spirit, is how we know that we abide in him. Dear brother, if you know his will for us, and you are eager to obey it, then you know he abides in you.

## Examine the spirits

- **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).

In its most basic meaning a spirit is energy. However, we usually think of a spirit as living energy. and every living thing has a spirit (in the world, only the spirits of men are eternal). However, we can also think of a spirit as an idea, an attitude, or an emotion in the minds of men. When John warned not to believe every spirit, he was referring to the teachings of men.

John cautioned us, his beloved brothers in Christ, to examine the spirits to see if they are of God or not. He commanded us to examine the spirits because many false prophets have gone out into the world. God's prophets during Bible times were inspired by his Holy Spirit to speak his words to us, which sometimes included foretelling the future. However, God no longer speaks to men by direct inspiration that way. He now speaks to us through the words of his Holy Bible.

Jesus and some of his disciples were the last men who spoke from divine inspiration. Such prophets are no longer needed because we have the complete word of God for us in the Bible. The author of the book of Hebrews spoke of that, when he 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).

Therefore, any kind of prophesying now is simply proclaiming the word of God from what is taught in the Bible. That is why the genuine disciples of Christ no longer refer to any man as a prophet. Referring to a man that way now would mislead too many people. It would imply the man was speaking from divine inspiration, which no longer happens.

Every man now who claims to be inspired from God is a false prophet. False prophets often teach some things that are true, but they mix their errors in with them. What they teach is like a poisoned apple. Jesus also warned about false prophets, when he said, **“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”** (Matthew 7:15-18).

When Jesus spoke of the fruits of false prophets, he was referring to the consequences of their lives and their teachings. Such bad fruits include things like leading people astray into sin, and preying upon them.

An example in the New Testament of a false prophet is the woman Jezebel who was with the congregation in Thyatira. Jesus told about her when said to that congregation, **“I know thy works, and thy love and faith and service and perseverance. And thy last works are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou tolerate thy woman Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my bondmen to fornicate, and to eat idol sacrifices”** (Revelation 2:20).

As John said, many false prophets have gone out into the world. That means there are many men who falsely claim to speak the word of God. As with speaking the truth in general, when a man speaks falsely he is a liar. And when a man speaks falsely about God and his will for us, that makes him a false prophet, as John uses the word. Therefore beware, and only trust the teachings of God’s holy word in the Bible.

## Confessing Jesus Christ

- **By this ye know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in flesh is of God. And every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is that of the antichrist, which ye have heard that it comes, and is now in the world already** (First John 4:2-3).

When John said we know the Spirit of God, he meant we recognize the Spirit of God. And when he said every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ having come in flesh, he meant every spirit that believes and obeys Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Hence, every faithful disciple of Christ has the Spirit of God within him. And that means every faithful disciple of Christ (both men and women) will become a son of God in heaven.

In contrast every spirit that does not believe and obey Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is not of God; he does not belong to God because he does not have the Spirit of God in him.

And when John said that was the antichrist, he meant that denial of Jesus was the spirit of the antichrist. He had already mentioned the antichrist in this book. And perhaps they had already heard of that spirit before John wrote. John said the antichrist, that spirit of denial in men that Jesus is the Son of God, was already in the world. As faith in Christ began to grow, so did the denials of him.

## We are of God and have overcome

- **Ye are of God, little children, and ye have overcome them, because greater is he in you than he in the world** (First John 4:4).

We who believe and obey Christ are of God; we belong to him in his kingdom. Remember what Peter said about it: **“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).

And when John said we have overcome them, he meant we who believe and obey Christ have overcome everybody who denies him, everybody who has the spirit of antichrist in them. We have overcome them with the steadfastness of our faith, which faith John says farther on is the victory: **“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 5:5).

We who believe and obey Christ have overcome the world, including those who deny Christ, because God is in us. And he is greater than the spirit of Satan that is in the world. Paul wrote about that spirit, when he told how we were once in the world: **“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).

## They are of the world

- **They are of the world. Because of this they speak of the world, and the world hears them** (First John 4:5).

They, those who deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, are of the world. They belong to the world. They think like the world, and they act sinfully like the world. Therefore, as John said, they speak of the world, and the world hears them.

What John meant by **“they speak of the world”** is that they speak about the world. All of their thinking and interacting together is about the world. Having denied the Son of God, the religion they may have is false and worldly. Hence, all their speaking is of the world, being about the world and worldly things. That is why the world hears them, because they speak of the world about the things of the world.

Those who deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God do not hear him, in the sense of believing what he says. As Jesus said to the Jews, **“Ye are from below, I am from above. Ye are of this world, I am not of this world”** (John 8:23), and, **“He who is of God hears the sayings of God. Because of this ye do not hear, because ye are not of God”** (John 8:47).

## Knowing the spirit of truth and of error

- **We are of God. He who knows God hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error** (First John 4:6).

We who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God are of God. And as John said, he who knows God hears us. Every man who loves truth and righteousness is of God, which means such a man is of the sheep of Christ. Remember, Jesus compared us to sheep when the Jews met him and asked if he were the Christ.

The record says about that meeting, **“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. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:24-27).

When Jesus said, **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:27), that means every man who loves truth and righteousness, knowing God, being among the sheep of Christ, will hear us when we teach about God and his will for us. And when they hear his words, they will follow him, which means to believe and obey him.

Those who is not of God, who are not of the sheep of Christ, who do not love truth and righteousness, do not hear us, meaning to accept us. They do not accept Christ and his good news of salvation that we preach to them.

John said that is how we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Remember, a spirit is a force of energy, including living energy. And the living energy within us includes our ideas, feelings, and attitudes. Hence, we have the spirit of truth in us when we believe and obey Christ as the Son of God, because Jesus is the truth. As said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me"** (John 14:6).

The spirit of error is a mentality of denial that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; it is the anti-christ spirit. It is the spirit that prevails in the world, leading men astray from the truth. Therefore, we know and recognize the spirit of truth when we see genuine faith in Christ. And we know and recognize the spirit of error when we see the denial of him.

## Love is of God

- **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** (First John 4:7-8).

Love is a force of attraction toward and a desire to benefit someone else. And we are commanded to love each other. Love for each other is something we must actively pursue. Love for each other is not something we should wait to happen, although love may sometimes develop that way.

The world speaks of "falling in love," as if love were something that seizes and overwhelms us. The lusts of our flesh do indeed try to seize and overwhelm us. But God wants the appetites of our flesh to be restrained and satisfied righteously. Lust is the desire to indulge an appetite sinfully. Therefore, when the world speaks of "falling in love with someone," they actually mean "falling into lust for them." And that is not the kind of love that is of God.

God blesses us and does us good because he loves us. He loves us because we are his offspring, made in his image. He made us that way because he wants to share his life with us. And he made us so that we too could have offspring to share life with us. By having our own sons and daughters to love, we can know something of why God loves us.

We as righteous fathers and mothers have children because we love them. We do good things for them, we sacrifice for them, and we even suffer for them. We love our children,

and we want them to love us because that is beneficial to us all. Loving and honoring us enables them to profit from our wisdom and resources. That way we can all enjoy life more and succeed in right living because we love each other.

Moreover, we also suffer when our children suffer, especially when they do wrong. When they transgress we try to correct them, and hope they will repent. Righteous parents are patient with them while waiting for them to repent, often being longsuffering toward them as God is toward us. And we grieve when they do not repent but become sinful and prodigal, as God grieves toward us when we transgress against him.

We who belong to Christ are God's children. When we believed and obeyed his Son Jesus Christ, then God adopted us and became our spiritual Father. Remember, Paul spoke of that, when he said, **"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"** (Romans 8:14-16).

We have been begotten again by him, because John said farther in this book, **"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). And if we remain faithful to his Son Jesus Christ, God will make us his sons for eternity in heaven with him.

John said that God is love. God is the very personification of love. And we are commanded to love him and love each other. And the more we learn about him and obey him, loving him and each other, the more we will be like him. That means the more we will think as he thinks and feels as he feels, and therefore the more we will be repulsed by the way the world thinks and feels.

When John said the man who does not love does not know God, he was speaking about not loving each other. For those of the world do love the things of the world. We who love our brothers in Christ are those who know God. But the world does not love us; they hate us.

Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about the hatred of the world: **"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).

Those who do not love Jesus do not know God. For Jesus said those words to the Jews who hated him: **"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 8:55).

## God loved us and sent his Son

- **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).

God revealed his enormous love for us by sending his only begotten Son into the world to save our souls and enable us to live through him. We can live only eternally through God's only begotten Son. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God in the sense that he was begotten in heaven at the beginning. How he was begotten is a great mystery, about which I will not conjecture. It is sufficient for us to know that he is God's only begotten Son.

We have been begotten again in spirit, but Jesus was begotten from God the Father in every way. The author of the book of Hebrews said that the Son of God is **“the radiance of his [God's] glory, and the exact image of his essence”** (Hebrews 1:3). That means the Son of God is also God, although not God the Father. He is God the way the son of a man is also a man.

And God loves his only begotten Son more than we could ever love any of our sons. Yet he still sent him here to live like us, and suffer and die (in the flesh) for us. Sacrificing his Son that way reveals how much God loves us. For it is only through his Son that we can live for eternity with God in heaven as his sons.

### In this is love

- **In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son, an atonement for our sins** (First John 4:10).

Remember, love is a force of attraction toward and a desire to benefit someone else. And the fact that God sent his Son, his only begotten Son, an atonement for our sins, proves the genuineness of his love for us. It was not that we loved God. Indeed, we were alienated to him, because of our guilt. Yet he still sent his son to atone for our sins. That is love, true love. It manifested his attraction toward us, and his desire to benefit us.

Jesus became an atonement for our sin by his life of perfect obedience, even to the point of a cruel death on the cross. God rewarded his obedience by forgiving all who belong to him. Thus, Jesus atoned for our sins by paying the price for those who belong to him. He bought us with his precious blood sacrifice.

Paul spoke of that, when he 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 it was because God loved us that he sent his only begotten Son to be an atonement for our sins.

### Loving each other

- **Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are obligated to love each other** (First John 4:11).

Not only are we *commanded* to love each other, but John said we are *obligated* to love each other. We are obligated because God so loved us. Remember this beautiful passage of scripture: **“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).

God commanded us to love our brothers in Christ, and he commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. And we are obligated to love them because God loves them. He so loved them that he gave his only begotten Son, so that those who believe in him would not perish, but have eternal life.

The only people that God does not love are the wicked workers of iniquity, the blood-thirsty, and the deceitful, the evil predators of men. For the psalmist said, **“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. Thou will destroy those who speak lies. Jehovah abhors the blood-thirsty and deceitful man”** (Psalm 5:3-6).

But even then, if the wicked repent, bearing fruit worthy of repentance, God will forgive them. For the prophet Ezekiel said, **“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins that he has committed, and keeps all my statutes, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live. He shall not die. None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him. In his righteousness that he has done he shall live. 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 18:21-23).

Nevertheless, even though God said none of the wicked man’s transgressions would be remembered against him, he must prove his genuineness by doing works worthy of repentance. Paul spoke of that when he was being tried before king Agrippa. Part of the description he gave of his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus was this: **“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).

## Seeing God

- **No man has ever seen God** (First John 4:12).

Only Jesus Christ the Son of God has ever seen God in his glory, but that was before he became a man. To what extent Jesus saw God in his glory while he was on the earth is not known. The nearest any other man has ever come to seeing God in his glory was Moses. Here is the story of how that happened: **“And he [Moses] said, Show me, I pray thee, thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee. I will be merciful to whom I may be merciful, and I will be compassionate to whomever I may be compassionate.**

**“And he said, Thou cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. And Jehovah said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shall stand upon the rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand until I have passed by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen”** (Exodus 33:18-23).

Nevertheless, we can see the Spirit of God. We can see him in the life of Jesus, because that is what he told Philip when he asked to see the Father: **“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? 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 14:8-10).

And the spirit of anyone is the most important thing about them. It is much more of a blessing to be able to see the Spirit of God (through the life of Christ) than is it to see God in his glory. The devil has seen God in his glory, yet he still hates him. And I believe that his hatred has made him unable to see the glory of God’s Spirit.

Remember what Jesus said to his disciples when they asked him why he spoke to the multitudes only in parables: **“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).

Having the wrong kind of heart will blind anyone. The record tell how Jesus once rebuked the multitudes for having the wrong kind of heart, when 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).

He then gave them a challenging lesson that caused many of the multitude to leave him. Here is what the record says happened after that lesson: **“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. 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 6:64-66).

## God abiding in us

- **If we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is in us having been fully perfected** (First John 4:12).

God abides in us through his Holy Spirit, as 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). God abides in us if we love each other, meaning our fellow Christians. His Spirit abides in us through the dynamic functioning of our knowledge of his word, and through the strong influence of our heightened conscience.

John also said that if we love each other God’s love is in us having been fully perfected. What John means by God’s love in us, is that we love the way he loves, and have the same kind of love he has. It is a righteous and noble love, an unselfish and sacrificial love. It is a love that always does what is good, right, and just.

And John said that kind of love is love fully perfected in us. When love is not fully perfected it is only a partial and undeveloped love. An example of love that is not fully perfected is a father and a mother who do some good things for their children, but also neglect doing other important things for them.

When we love each other with the kind of love that God has for us, then he not only abides in us, but his kind of love has been fully perfected in us. It is exactly the kind of love that God wants in us. Therefore, we must love each other as he loves us, not with an incomplete or partial love.

## Abiding in him

- **In this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us from his Spirit** (First John 4:13).

God has given us from his Spirit by his Holy Spirit, because his Holy Spirit is part of him. God sends his Spirit in the world to influence it and to sustain it. But he only gives his Holy Spirit to those who believe and obey his Son Jesus Christ. The energy of God's Spirit can and has been misused to commit evil. As offspring of God made in his image, and born with a pure spirit, many men have corrupted their divine spirit into evil spirits. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

We who have been begotten again from his Spirit have his Holy Spirit given to us. And that Spirit cannot be corrupted. If a disciple of Christ were to forsake the Lord and live in sin, God's Holy Spirit would depart from him.

Abiding in Christ and he in us means being united together under his Lordship. And we know that we abide in him because of the influence of God's Holy Spirit in us. We can feel that power through our heightened conscience. And we can perceive that power through our obedience to his will for us. Hence, by being aware of our improved conscience, and our righteous living, we can know that we abide in him and he in us.

## A Savior of the world

- **And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son, a Savior of the world** (First John 4:14).

John and the other apostles could personally testify about the Son of God, because they had seen him and lived with him for the three years of his ministry. They could testify from their own experience that the Father did indeed send his Son, a Savior of the world.

God the Father sent his only begotten Son to be a Savior of the world. Jesus is a Savior of the world in the sense of offering the world salvation from the condemnation of their sins. Remember these beautiful words from John's biography of him: **"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).

Notice how the words say that only those who believe in the Son will be saved. Those of the world who do not believe in him are condemned already because of their sins. For only faith and obedience to Christ can save a man from the condemnation of his sin. And every man has become guilty of sin.

## God abiding in us and we in him

- **Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God** (First John 4:15).

God abides in us and we in him by our acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God. What John means by acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God, is our acceptance of him as our Lord and Savior. It means we are united with God under his Lordship when we become faithful disciples of Christ. Without faith and obedience to the Son of God, no man can be united with God. All unrepentant sinners remain alien to him and condemned.

Moreover, simply admitting that Jesus is the Son of God is not enough. For remember this story: **“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. 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 8:28-29). Even the demons confessed him.

John said earlier that if we love each other, God abides in us. Now he says that whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him. We cannot take one passage about abiding in God, and conclude that passage says it all. In the same way, we cannot take one passage about what saves us, and conclude that passage says it all.

For example, Paul said, **“For ye are saved by grace through faith, and this a gift of God, not from you, not from works, so that not any man may boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Based upon that one passage, a man might conclude that we are saved by faith only. However, James gave much evidence to the contrary, and concluded by saying, **“For as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without the works is dead”** (James 2:26). We cannot draw conclusions from one passage or a few passages, and ignore what other scriptures say. False teachers do it. Beware of them, because they are very popular, and lead many souls astray.

## The love that God has in us

- **And we know, and have believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him** (First John 4:16).

Remember, John said earlier, **“If we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is in us having been fully perfected.”** And what John means by the love that God has in us, is that we love the way he loves, having the same kind of love he has. And John said we know and have believed that. We know and have believed that we have God’s love in us, because

we believe in his Son Jesus Christ  
we love each other  
we love the way he loves.

And because God is love, then he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. That means we are united together with him under his Lordship. Jesus prayed about our unity during the time of his last supper with his apostles, when he 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”** (John 17:20-21).

There can be no life or any kind of constructive endeavor without some kind of love. For example, the cells of an organism love each other in the sense that they work together cooperatively, even willing to sacrifice themselves. Of course, they do it because God programmed that behavior in them. And everywhere you find cooperation for righteous endeavors is an example of love at work. For love is the force that unites things together for productivity.

Nevertheless remember, the kind of love God wants of us is not the perverted kind of love the world promotes. God is not like an indulgent Santa Claus. The Santa Clause myth is one of the most perverse and destructive of the myths men have invented and promote. If you want an example of the kind of love God wants of us, read about the righteous men of the Bible, men such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David (his whole life), Elijah, and many others. None of whom were like the mythical characters that the world has invented to illustrate their perverted concept of love.

## Love fully perfected with us

- **By this love has been fully perfected with us, so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because just as that man is, we also are in this world** (First John 4:17).

Love is fully perfected with us when we acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God, and we love each other. That unites us with God and Christ. And that way we may have boldness in the day of judgment. We can have boldness in the sense of having extreme confidence and assurance. Remember however, acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God includes loving him, obeying his commandments, and doing good works.

Notice how John refers to Christ in heaven as that man. Jesus was a man on the earth and he is a man in heaven. Indeed, many times Jesus called himself “the son of man.” He is a man because we are his brothers, and when we get to heaven we will still be men. Men (in the generic sense) are the only offspring of God who have been chosen to have the potential to become sons of God in heaven. And we can realize that potential by believing and obeying Christ, and loving each other.

That way, just as Christ is both a man and the Son of God, so also we are both men and sons of God in this world. For it is only by living as a man (male or female) in this world that we can have the potential to become sons of God in heaven.

Remember how John said that we will be like him: **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2). Remember, we are called children of God now because both men and women have the same potential to become sons of God in heaven. We will all be sons of God there because the female form—with its wide hips, narrow shoulders, milk producing breasts, organs to bear children—is a temporary one for this life only.

Paul spoke of our being like Christ in this world, when he urged us to imitate God: **“Become ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children”** (Ephesians 5:1).

## Perfect love casts out fear

- **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).

The word fear is used in different ways in the Bible, ranging from feelings of terror to an attitude of respectful awe. When we are commanded to fear God (for example First Peter 2:17) that does not mean to be terrified of him. It means to be reverently respectful of him, and be aware of his mighty power to reward and to punish.

The kind of fear that John speaks about in the above passage is the kind the apostles experienced when they first saw Jesus walking on 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).

They were not afraid of Jesus, but of what they thought was a ghost. They were afraid of a ghost because they thought they could be harmed by such an alien force. They were not afraid of Jesus, because they loved him and faithfully followed him.

Nevertheless, they did fear him in the sense of being aware of his mighty power. For remember what happened when he calmed the storm at sea: **“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 4:37-41). They were attracted to Jesus by their love for him, yet they still feared a great fear of him because of his power.

John said perfect love casts out fear, meaning the kind of fear that causes fleeing. When our love for God is full, mature, and complete, then we have no reason to be repulsed with

fear of him. The unrepentant sinners of the world do not fear Christ now, but they will be terrified of him and try to flee from him when he returns again at the end of the world.

As the book of Revelation says, **“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 6:15-17).

However, we who are united with God and Christ will rejoice on that day. We will rejoice because we will know he is coming to reward our faithfulness. For Revelation also says,

**“And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Praise ye our God, all his bondmen and those who fear him, the small and the great. 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 19:5-9).

## He first loved us

- **We love him, because he first loved us** (First John 4:19).

The kind of love that God is and that he wants us to have is an interactive love. That means love begets love in an ever progressing and developing upward spiral. As God loves us and we love him, then we become united and more productive. It is a well known truth that there is strength in unity. And there is no greater unity than the unity of love.

God is love, and he began the process of loving. He first loved us because he is love, and he wanted to share his life with us as his sons for eternity in heaven. And because of his great love for us, we who are worthy of becoming his sons for eternity also love him. Thus, we become part of a great interacting, uplifting, and never ending unity of love with God. Our unified love with God in the new heavens and earth will be used to create unimaginably wonderful new things there for us to enjoy together.

## Loving God and our brother

- **If any man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And we have this commandment from him, so that he who loves God will also love his brother** (First John 4:20-21).

John said earlier, **“He who claims to be in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness until now”** (1Jo 2:9). And now he says a man who claims to love God but hates

his brother is a liar. Those are even stronger words of rebuke. Many places in this book John emphasizes the necessity of loving all of our brothers and not hating any of them.

As long as a man is a faithful brother in Christ to us, we cannot hate him. We can be disappointed in a brother. We can rebuke and chasten a brother when he deserves it. We can even withdraw our fellowship from a brother, but we cannot hate a brother. To hate means to have a strong dislike for and ill will toward. And as long as a man remains a brother in Christ, we cannot have a strong dislike for and ill will toward him. We are commanded to love him. Nevertheless remember, a man can lose his sonship with God if he forsakes Christ. Such a reprobate is no longer our brother.

John even questions whether a man who hates his brother is capable of loving God. John asks how such a man could love God whom he has never even seen. Such a man cannot love God because he does not know God. He does not know him because he does not keep the commandment to love his brother. That proves he does not know God.

Remember, John said that keeping the commandments was how we know that we know God: **“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). And one of the commandments is to love our brothers, as Jesus said: **“This is my commandment, that ye love each other, just as I have loved you”** (John 15:12). Hence, if a man does not love his brother he is not keeping the commandment of Christ, which means he does not know God. He may think he does, but by his failure to love his brother he proves that he does not know God.

John then says, **“And we have this commandment from him, so that he who loves God will also love his brother.”** The commandment we have from him is to love each other. We have that commandment so that he who loves God will also love his brother. That means loving God and loving our brother are inseparable. When we love our brother we will love God, and when we love God we will love our brother.

He who does not love his brother cannot love God. And he who does not love God will not love his brother, because such a man is a sinner, and one of the characteristics of sinners is hating each other, as Paul said: **“For we also were formerly foolish, disobedient, being led astray, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in evil and envy, hateful, hating each other”** (Titus 3:3).

Therefore, if you truly want to know God and love him, then love your (Christian) brother, **“Because love is of God, and every man who loves has been begotten of God, and knows God.”**

## Begotten from God

- **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).

We are begotten from God in our spirit when we believe his Son Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and are immersed in water for the remission of them. Remember what Jesus said

to Nicodemus: **“If any man is not begotten from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

John said that every man who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten from God. And the only way to be begotten from God is from water and the Spirit. Hence, those who refuse to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins do not genuinely believe in Christ. They believe in a mythical character of their popular imagination that they call Christ—an effeminate, long-haired pacifist. If they believed in the true Christ they would not hesitate to obey his command to be immersed in water for the remission of their sins.

John said **“every man who loves him who begot, also loves him who has been begotten from him.”** That means every man who loves God, also loves his Christian brother. For loving God and loving our brother are inseparable. No man who does not love his brother can love God. Dear brother, how much more could John have said to emphasize our responsibility to love each other, loving each one of us?

## Keeping his commandments

- **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we may keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome** (First John 5:2-3).

John said earlier, **“And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments”** (First John 2:3). We can know that we know God when we keep his commandments. And likewise, we can know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments.

Just as loving God and loving our brother are inseparable, so also loving God and keeping his commandments are inseparable from loving the children of God. Loving God, loving each other, and keeping his commandments are all integrated together. They are all integrated together with God’s love for us.

For it is the love of God that we should keep his commandments. It is because God loves us that he wants us to keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome; they are given for our benefit and welfare. Remember what Solomon said about nations: **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34).

God’s commandments are not arbitrary rules of a tyrant. They are good words of advice and wisdom from a loving Father. They are all given to keep us from evil and show us how to live productively. Only a degenerate sinner thinks that his commandments are burdensome. Such men are blind fools, because the love of God is that we should keep his commandments. They are given to us because he loves us.

## The victory that overcomes 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).

What does John mean by everything that has been begotten of God? When God created the world it was not begotten from him. Neither were the birds or the fish or the other animals begotten from him. Only man was begotten from God and made in his image. Why then would John speak of everything that has been begotten from God?

John clarifies what he means by saying, **“And who is he who overcomes the world, if not he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”** We are the everything that overcomes the world, because we have been begotten from God, begotten again to be his children through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. (Adam was begotten of God, but he lost his sonship when he sinned. And so does every man because every man sins. Only through Christ can we be begotten again to be children of God again.)

Apparently John chose the word everything in that passage to emphasize that every single man, without exception (whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor), who has been begotten from God overcomes the world.

Now remember, this world is a gigantic place with a huge population. Hence, overcoming it is no small achievement. It is a colossal achievement. But how do we overcome it? We overcome the world by our faith in Jesus Christ. We overcome the world the way Jesus overcame the world. Remember, he said to his apostles, **“In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

Jesus overcame the world, not by immediate physical conquest, but by prevailing over the forces of evil, both within him (his flesh) and outside of him, that would destroy his soul. Having overcome the world that way, he will eventually overcome all of it with its complete destruction.

And we too overcome the world by prevailing over the forces of evil, both within us and outside of us, that would destroy our soul. And having overcome the world that way, we will join with Christ in the new world in heaven after this one is over. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world, because it is through our faith in Christ that we are enabled to prevail over the evil forces of this world that would destroy our souls.

## The water and the blood

- **This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ—not by the water only, but by the water and the blood** (First John 5:6).

Jesus began his ministry after his immersion in water by John the immerser. It was then that God spoke from heaven to acknowledge Jesus as his Son: **“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). And his church, the kingdom of God, began after the sacrifice of his blood upon the cross.

Hence, he came by water and blood: water referring to his immersion by John at the beginning of his ministry, and the blood referring to his death upon the cross. That enabled the establishment of his church, which was formally opened by Peter on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension back to heaven (see Acts 2). Hence, water at the beginning of his ministry and blood at the ending of it.

## The Spirit is truth

- **And it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is truth** (First John 5:6).

It is the Spirit of God that first testified about Jesus being the Son of God when it descended like a dove upon him (see Matthew 3:16). And the Spirit of God continued to testify about Jesus. Remember what Jesus said to his apostles about his works: **“The sayings that I speak to you I speak not from myself, but the [Spirit of the] Father who dwells in me, he does the works”** (John 14:10).

And Jesus said to the Jews, **“I am he who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me”** (John 8:18). The Father testified about Jesus through the mighty works that he did.

Moreover, Jesus also said to his apostles that the helper, the Spirit of truth, God's Holy Spirit, would testify about him after his departure: **“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 Holy Spirit of God now testifies about Jesus through the Holy Bible that contains the record of his life and his teachings. John said about his testimony at the end of his biography of Jesus, **“This is the disciple who testifies about these things, and who wrote these things. And we know that his testimony is true”** (John 21:24). And the words of John were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth, and John now says the Spirit is truth. Truth is knowledge that is correct, accurate, and factual. And everything spoken by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is truth—it is correct, accurate, and factual. Therefore, the knowledge of the Bible can be trusted as perfectly correct, accurate, and factual. Believe not the scoffers who deny the truth of the Bible, regardless of how much worldly knowledge they may have. They are like the ancient scholars who denied and opposed Jesus.

## Those who testify are three

- **Because those who testify are three: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. And the three are in one** (First John 5:7-8).

The King James Version and a few others have different wording for that passage. Instead of the above words, they say, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

The KJV was based upon the edition of the Greek New Testament compiled by the sixteenth century Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus. There are many surviving manuscripts of the books of the New Testament. And they do not all agree exactly, virtually all of

which differences are minor and insignificant. For example, some might say in a passage Jesus Christ, while others say Christ Jesus. Therefore, in order to have a translation of the New Testament, selections must be made among the manuscripts to create a Greek edition that translators can use. Of course, they all try to create what they think is the best edition, but they do not agree on everything.

The issue about the New Testament manuscripts is much too complex to discuss here. Instead, I have written an essay entitled *Preserving the Word of God* which is contained in the epilogue to this commentary where you can learn more about it.

Nevertheless, I will quote the explanation I gave in that essay about why there is such a large difference in the wording of the above passage by the KJV. Here is what I wrote about it:

Erasmus relied on about a half dozen (the exact number is debated) Greek manuscripts of the New Testament for his printed edition. He also inserted a few verses translated from the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus eventually produced five editions, making corrections and changes each time. But it was not until the third edition that he inserted the controversial words in 1 John 5:7 about the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit being one. He did not have them in his first editions because they were not in the Greek manuscripts he used

Having been criticized by some because of that, he promised to include the words in the next edition, but only if a manuscript could be found containing them. [His critics wanted those words inserted because they believed in the trinity theory.] Eventually a paper copy was “found.” But it is almost certain that it was written for the expressed purpose of satisfying his demand. For scholars date the age of that manuscript in the same century that Erasmus did his work.

Therefore, do not trust and accept what the King James Version has for that passage; it is a false translation, unfaithful to the majority of the Greek manuscripts, which are much more trustworthy.

Now about what that passage says. The Spirit of God testifies through the words of the Bible, which gives us the knowledge we need for our salvation. Water can be said to testify because it is necessary for life and for cleansing. And Jesus is the only way we can be cleansed of our sins and have eternal life. Moreover, our immersion in water in obedience to Jesus’ command is to cleanse us of our sins and give us a new spiritual life.

Remember how Peter said that water saves us. After mentioning how Noah and his family were saved in the ark through water, Peter said, **“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).

And remember how Paul said our immersion enabled us to have newness of life: **“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 6:4).

Blood can be said to testify because it symbolizes a sacrificial life, which is also required to be a disciple of Christ. As Jesus said, **“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).

Those three testify—the Spirit, and the water, and the blood—by informing us how we can be saved for eternal life. Which is

by knowing and obeying the will of God  
being immersed in water for the remission of our sins  
living a sacrificial life for the cause of Christ

Hence, the three are in one in the sense of informing us about our fundamental requirements for salvation.

## The testimony of God

- **If we accept the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. Because this is the testimony of God that he has testified about his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified about his Son** (First John 5:9-10).

Everybody accepts the testimony of men. For the great bulk of our knowledge has been received from the testimony of men. What our parents taught us, the textbooks we used in school as well as everything else we read, the information we receive from the radio and television broadcasts and other electronic media, are all testimonies of men. And we accept the great majority of that testimony as true.

Nevertheless, as John says, the testimony of God is greater than the testimony of men. And he has testified to us about his Son Jesus Christ. The entire New Testament is the testimony of God about his Son. And there is no other book that can even come close to having all the mighty wisdom and truth it contains.

John said that he who believes in the Son of God has the testimony of God in himself. That testimony about God’s Son is filled with truth and wisdom. Consequently, we who believe have that truth and wisdom in us. He who does not believe, lives in the darkness of ignorance.

Moreover, he who does not believe that testimony has made God a liar, in the sense that by his unbelief he is proclaiming God is a liar. When in fact, such a man because of his unbelief, he is the liar. The testimony that God has given us in the Bible is more than sufficient to persuade any man who loves truth and righteousness, is humble and lowly in heart, and is open minded to learn. Such a man is of the sheep of Christ, and he will accept the testimony of God when he hears it.

## God gave eternal life to us

- **And this is the testimony, that God gave eternal life to us, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life** (First John 5:11-12).

God gave his testimony through his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, as Jesus said, **“I am he who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me testifies about me”** (John 8:18). God testified about Jesus through the mighty miracles Jesus performed, which could only have been done with the power of God.

God’s testimony is that he gave eternal life to us through his Son Jesus Christ. That is the fundamental message of Christ’s good news of salvation: that God gives us eternal life in his Son. Therefore, he who has the Son has the life. And the way we have the Son is by believing and obeying him. We have him in the sense that a child has a father and a mother. We become a part of his kingdom, the church.

Notice how John says that he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life, eternal life. The idea that God will accept people of all religions is a lie of the devil. As 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).

## Knowing we have eternal life

- **I wrote these things to you, those who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe in the name of the Son of God** (First John 5:13).

We believe in the name of the Son of God because his name represents him. When we honor his name we are honoring him. And he who dishonors his name dishonors him. That is why God gave this one 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).

Therefore, believing in the name of the Son of God means believing in him. And John said he wrote those things to us who believe in the name of the Son of God so that we may know we have eternal life.

Notice how John said we can *know* we have eternal life. Knowing means being certain about something. And we who believe in the name of the Son of God can be certain we have eternal life. Remember what Jesus said about eternal life: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). If we believe in him then we can know that we have eternal life. He is the very Son of God, co-creator of the world, and he has the power of eternal life. Therefore, when he says it we can know it.

Notice also how John said he wrote those things to us who believe in the name of the Son of God so that we may believe in the name of the Son of God. Why would John say he wrote to us who believe so that we may believe? That may at first seem to be a tautology, but John would not write so foolishly, nor would the Holy Spirit approve a tautology. There is always a logical explanation for every puzzle in the Bible. And it is our duty as men of faith to find the explanations and share them with others.

No doubt the reason John wrote that way is that our faith in the Son of God is something that should continue to grow. John is saying he wrote to us who believe so that our faith would increase and strengthen. John was writing to fortify our faith.

If you read the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis you will see that God waited for Abraham's faith in him to greatly grow before he tested it so severely with his command to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering. God wants the faith of all of us to grow and strengthen. And increasing our knowledge of his holy word helps us. That is why John wrote to us who believe so that we may believe, so that our faith will increase and grow stronger.

### Asking anything according to his will

- **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).

Confidence means being assured about something. And John says that the confidence we have toward God, our assurance about our relationship with him, is so great that whatever we ask him according to his will, he hears us. That means we who believe in his Son Jesus Christ are guaranteed to have whatever we ask of him—if it is according to his will. And that means asking for whatever is good and right and just, and wise in his sight.

John emphasized our confidence toward God by repeating what he said with similar words, but also saying **“if we know that he hears us.”** Knowing that he hears us means if our faith in him is so strong that it has become knowledge in our hearts, then **“whatever we may ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.”**

But remember, whatever we ask must be according to his will. And with our very limited perception of the world, what we may think is according to his will may not be. For example, we may ask for something that God knows would eventually be bad, either for us or for someone else. Also, he may have other plans for us that are better. Therefore, even if we know that he hears us, we may not be given what we ask because it would not be according to his will, even though we may think it would be.

Remember that when you ask him for things, so that you will not be disappointed if he does not give them. Also 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). Ask with faith, and then let God decide what is best.

### Sins toward death and not toward death

- **If any man may see his brother sinning a sin not toward death, he will ask, and he will give life to him, to those not sinning toward death. There is sin toward death. I do not say that he should make request about that.**
- **All unrighteousness is sin. And there is sin not toward death** (First John 5:16-17).

This is not an easy passage to interpret. As the nineteenth century Bible commentator Adam Clarke said, “This is an extremely difficult passage, and has been variously interpreted.” Therefore, all I can do is suggest what John meant by those words.

Remember, John uses the word sin in different ways, sometimes saying we cannot sin (see for example, First John 3:9), but then saying we do sin (see for example, First John 1:8). When John says we cannot sin he is using the word sin in a special way. He is referring to sin that is fatal, like that of Adam and every man before being redeemed by Christ. We who belong to Christ cannot sin that way. Our (occasional) offenses against God are not fatal.

When John says, “**If any man may see his brother sinning a sin ...**,” he is using the word sin in a much broader sense, to refer to any kind of offense against God. For he also said, “**All unrighteousness is sin.**” Therefore, a sin not toward death probably refers to one that will not condemn a Christian to hell. For example, smoking is a sin toward (physical) death, because it shortens the lifespan. But I do not believe that God will condemn a man to hell just because he smokes. And there are other such minor sins that are not toward death (in my judgment). Gluttony is another example. Women speaking during the assembly is another.

John said we can pray for them, and God will give them life. That probably means if we pray for such a Christian man he will still be given eternal life, even though he is sinning a sin, one not toward death. That means if we pray for a brother sinning a sin not toward death, God will not condemn him, but will give him eternal life, because he is a brother, a fellow Christian. Nevertheless, even though when we pray for him and God gives him life, such a man will still suffer the consequences of whatever his sin not toward death is, unless he repents of it. For example, the Christian smoker will live a shorter life in the flesh, and may even suffer death by cancer, but God will still give him (eternal) life if he continues to be a faithful disciple of Christ.

A sin toward death is one that will condemn a man to hell whether he is a disciple of Christ or not. For example, a Christian might begin to deny Christ and turn against him. John says he is not saying we should make request (to God) about such a man. We are not commanded against praying for him, but the implication is that the prayer will have no effect.

As John says, all unrighteousness is sin, however there is a sin not toward death. The value of knowing there is a sin not toward death is that we should pray for a brother sinning that way. Not only should we pray for him, but we should do what we can to encourage such a man to turn from the sin. In the case of smokers, we should admonish them to quit whenever we have the opportunity, and not simply ignore it. Too many Christians take the cowardly way and simply ignore such sins, even though they are given good opportunities to warn whoever is guilty.

## The evil does not touch us

- **We know that every man who has been begotten from God does not sin, but he who was begotten from God keeps himself, and the evil does not touch him** (First John 5:18).

Every authentic disciple of Christ has been begotten from God, begotten in spirit from his Spirit. And in order to be an authentic disciple of Christ we must repent of our sins and forsake them. Therefore, every man who has been begotten from God does not sin, but he keeps himself, and the evil does not touch him. Every faithful disciple keeps himself away from sin. That way the evil does not touch him. If we keep ourselves from all physical uncleanness (insofar as we are able), then diseases from microorganisms do not touch us. And if we keep ourselves from all spiritual uncleanness, then spiritual evil will not touch us.

There is another way that we do not sin and evil does not touch us. Every man who has been begotten from God becomes a child of God. And as a child of God, he does not regard our transgressions as sin. An earthly father does not regard the misdeeds of his children as crimes. And our heavenly Father does not regard our misdeeds and transgressions as sins. He will punish us with chastening, but he will not condemn us. Therefore, the evil of eternal condemnation does not touch us.

Nevertheless, if a man turns away from Christ he will fall from God's grace. God will "unforgive" him and will again regard his misdeeds as sin. God condemns every man who rejects Christ, whether he had formerly been a disciple or not. The doctrine of once-saved-always-saved is false. Be not led astray just because it is believed by so many.

## We are of God

- **We know that we are of God, and the whole world is set in the evil** (First John 5:19).

John uses the word "know" many times in this book. To know means to have knowledge. And through the words of the Holy Bible we have knowledge of God and that we are of him. We know that we are of God because we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and we obey his commandments, including that we love each other.

The whole world is set in the evil because they have chosen to follow the devil and his ways. They have chosen to follow him because they love evil. They love to sin. They love lying and cheating and fornicating and drunkenness and revelry and destructiveness. They love folly and wickedness, and they glorify such things. The more you see of the world, the more you will see how much they love those things. That is why the whole world is set in the evil. And that is why God is going to eventually destroy it.

## Knowing the true

- **And we know that the Son of God comes. And has given us understanding so that we may know the true. And we are in the true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and the eternal life** (First John 5:20).

Our faith and conviction about Christ is so strong that we know he comes. We know he comes again in the clouds to take us up to be with him in heaven, because he said he would. And he has opened our eyes to see and have understanding, which the world does not have, nor can have because they love evil.

Remember when his disciples asked Jesus why he spoke to the multitudes in parables: **“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 was not being impartial, because the multitudes were unworthy of knowing. And they prove it (see for example John 6:66).

John said that Jesus gave us understanding, and that enables us to know the true. John then said that Jesus Christ the Son of God is the true, and we are in him, the true. Being the true means he is faithful and loyal; he is genuine and authentic; he is the true Son of God. He personifies the true. And because we believe and obey him, that means we are in the true.

Moreover, being the Son of God the Father, Jesus is the true God and the eternal life. Jesus is not God the Father, but he is God the Son. Thus, he is God in every way. Just as I am a man in every way because my father was a man, so also the Son of God is God in every way because his Father is God. Nevertheless, the Son of God is not God the Father, any more than I am my father. He was begotten from God, being the only begotten Son of God in heaven.

And because the Son of God is the true God, he is also the eternal life. That means he not only himself has eternal life, but he has the power to give eternal life. Remember how Jesus began his prayer to the Father during the time of his last supper with his apostles: **“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).

## Guard yourselves from the idols

- **Little children, guard yourselves from the idols. Truly** (First John 5:21).

Remember, addressing us as little children shows how much John loves us. It is an expression of a high degree of affection. And with that loving expression, John ends this book with the warning to guard ourselves from the idols. During ancient times the idols were objects of stone, wood, and metal. And many people in Asia still worship idols of that kind.

However, most of the things that people now worship as idols are ideological. For example, in my country America the people worship the idols of freedom, democracy, and our national Constitution, instead of Jesus Christ. And as all idols do, those idols of ideology fail to promote truth and righteousness, and they fail to defeat evil and wickedness. Nevertheless, like the foolish Israelites did during ancient times, regardless of how much trouble and sorrow those idols cause, the foolish modern Americans just cry out more vigorously in worship of them.

Dear brothers, heed John’s warning and keep yourselves from idols of all kinds. Do not be lured by their popularity in the world, whether those idols are physical or ideological.

# A Commentary on The Second Letter of John

## To the chosen lady

- **The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us, and will be with us into the age** (Second John 1:1-2).

The Greek word EKKLHSIAS (transliterated ecclesias) means congregation, assembly, or church. And because that word is in the feminine gender, some people believe “the chosen lady” John refers to is a congregation of disciples. However, nowhere else in the New Testament is a congregation of Christ referred to as a lady. In the book of Revelation, Jesus sent messages to seven congregations in Asia. In none of those messages did he refer to a congregation as a lady.

Therefore, it is my belief that John was writing to a Christian woman and her children. He called her a chosen lady because there are many places in the New Testament that refer to the disciples of Christ as the chosen of God. Jesus himself referred to us that way. For example, when he was describing the end of the world, among other things, he said about himself, “**And he [the Son of man] 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 24:31).

John said he loved that lady and her children in truth. Loving in truth means to love genuinely and sincerely, because we are of the truth. As John said in his first book, “**My little children, we should not love in word, nor with the tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before him**” (First John 3:18-19). Therefore, we should love each other in truth.

John’s reference to himself as “the elder” probably simply meant he was an old man. Peter also called himself an elder in his first book: “**I, a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of the Christ, and a partaker of the glory going to be revealed, exhort the elders among you ...**” (First Peter 5:1). However, Peter was referring to the congregational office of elder, also called overseer.

John said to that chosen lady and her children that not only did he love them in truth, but also all those who know the truth. In other words, all the disciples of Christ loved her and her children. And we too should love her and her children, because they were disciples of Christ, and we are both commanded and obligated to love each other.

We love her and her children, and all who belong to Christ, because of the truth that abides in us. The truth that abides in us is the knowledge of Christ and his good news of our salvation, which we have internalized and assimilated into our hearts and minds to guide our lives.

John said that truth abiding in us will be with us into the age. That truth transforms our eternal spirit, making us more like Christ. And that transformation will follow us into the next life, the age or era of our lives in heaven.

## Grace, mercy, peace

- **Grace, mercy, peace will be with us from God the Father, and from Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love** (Second John 1:3).

Both Peter and Paul in their books of the New Testament called for grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ to be with us. Sinners do not receive grace, mercy, and peace from them. The only way they can receive grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ is to repent and follow the Son of God.

John said grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ will be with us. Those wonderful blessings will be with us during our new lives in heaven. And they will be with us from God and Christ in truth and love. Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us in truth, because those blessings will be authentic, genuine, and sincere. And grace, mercy, and peace will be with us in love because they will be given lovingly by our beloved heavenly Father and our beloved brother and Lord, Jesus Christ.

## Thy children walk in truth

- **I rejoice exceedingly that I have found of thy children walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father** (Second John 1:4).

To walk in truth means to live righteously, and we have received that commandment from God the Father. Remember, throughout the Bible, life is compared to a journey, and living is compared with walking. For example, Moses said to the sons of Israel, **“And now, Israel, what does Jehovah thy God require of thee, but to fear Jehovah thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve Jehovah thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of Jehovah, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?”** (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

John rejoiced exceedingly because he found her children walking in truth. Walking in truth means walking by the Spirit of God, because John said, **“the Spirit is truth”** (First John 5:6). Walking in truth means doing things that are good and right and just, living righteously according to the will of God.

We should all rejoice exceedingly when the children of our brothers in Christ walk in truth. We are the children of God, and he rejoices when we walk in truth. For example, the prophet Zephaniah said about Jerusalem, **“Jehovah thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love. He will joy over thee with singing”** (Zephaniah 3:17).

## Not a new commandment

- **And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing a new commandment to thee, but what we had from the beginning, that we would love each other. And**

**this is love, that we should walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, just as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it** (Second John 1:5-6).

The commandment for us to love each other was given by our Lord Christ during the last supper with his apostles, saying to them, **“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). Therefore, John was not writing a new commandment.

John described love as walking according to God’s commandments. God does not give his commandments capriciously. They are all for our benefit. Obedience to his commandments produces righteousness; it results in things that are good and right and just. Therefore, when we walk according to his commandments we are showing our love for each other, because our obedience is beneficial. Remember what Moses said about God’s commandments to the Israelites. He said of them, **“... which I command thee this day for thy good.”**

Hence, John said that loving each other is the commandment. For obedience to God’s commandments and loving each other are inseparable. We cannot genuinely love each other unless we obey God’s commandments, because they are the only way we can genuinely do good to each other.

## The antichrist

- **Because many deceivers have gone forth into the world, those not acknowledging Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist** (Second John 1:7).

John also defined the antichrist in his first book, when he said, **“Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son”** (First John 2:22), and, **“And every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in flesh is not of God. And this is that of the antichrist, which ye have heard that it comes, and is now in the world already”** (First John 2:22 & 4:3).

It is clear that “the antichrist” is simply the attitude or spirit within people who deny that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. That means most of the world are antichrist. And those who proclaim that Jesus is not the Christ the Son of God are the deceivers. John said many of them had gone forth into the world, and there are indeed still many such deceivers who have gone forth into the world, proclaiming that Jesus is not the Son of God.

## Watch yourselves

- **Watch yourselves, so that we may not lose what we have wrought, but may receive a full reward** (Second John 1:8).

John warned that lady and her children to watch themselves. He said otherwise “we” might lose what “we” have wrought, and would not receive a full reward. Part of the

reward we have is the joy we receive when we see people that we have helped repent and turn to the Lord.

For examples, Paul said about himself, **“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boast? Or is it not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy”** (First Thessalonians 2:19-20). And John said at the beginning of his first book, **“... what we have seen and heard [about Jesus Christ] 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”** (First John 1:3-4).

God and Christ have worked for our salvation, and they continue to work for it. We, the disciples of Christ, work for the salvation of other lost souls. And each individual must work out his own salvation, as Paul said, **“Therefore my beloved, just as ye have always obeyed, not only as in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to desire and to work for approval”** (Philippians 2:12-13).

We all work together for the salvation of souls. And seeing souls being saved gives us a reward of joy in our hearts, just as it gave Paul and John joy in their hearts. Therefore, we should warn other Christians to watch themselves, so that we may not lose what we have wrought. Watching themselves will help prevent losing what we have all worked for—their eternal salvation. Watching will help us all receive a full reward.

Jesus gave many warnings to watch for our souls. He said, for example, **“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 13:35-37).

## Abiding in the doctrine of the Christ

- **Every man transgressing, and not abiding in the doctrine of the Christ, does not have God. The man abiding in the doctrine of the Christ, this man has both the Father and the Son** (Second John 1:9).

The doctrine of the Christ is to believe in him, obey his commandments, and love each other. Every man who does not do those things is transgressing the will of God. And John said transgressors do not have God. Having God is like a child having a father. We who abide in the doctrine of Christ have both the Father and the Son. That means we belong to them. We belong to our heavenly Father as his children, and we belong to the Son as his spiritual brothers.

## He who does not bring this doctrine

- **If any man comes to you, and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into a house, and do not speak to him to rejoice. For he who speaks to him to rejoice, partakes of his evil works** (Second John 1:10-11).

Receiving a man into a house means treating him as an honored guest. We may allow a man who does not bring the doctrine of Christ to enter our house temporarily in order to teach him. But we may not treat him as an honored guest.

Moreover, we cannot speak to a man who brings a different doctrine to rejoice. That means we cannot give him a pleasant greeting, such as saying, "Have a nice day." Otherwise, we would be expressing approval of him. And that would make us a partaker of his evil works. The popular idea of religious tolerance is nowhere supported in the Bible. Instead it is condemned.

Now that does not mean we cannot give a pleasant greeting to nonbelievers. It is men who are actively promoting a false doctrine that we cannot receive into our house as honored guests, or give a pleasant greeting.

The purpose in what John says is to prevent us from giving any kind of support or encouragement to any man who brings another doctrine instead of the doctrine of Christ. Giving him any kind of support or encouragement makes us a partaker of his evil works.

Notice how John says that any other doctrine besides the doctrine of Christ is evil. And men who bring those other doctrines are doing evil works. Among those evil works are the doctrines of Catholicism, Judaism, Mormonism, Humanism, Islam, Buddhism, and numerous other false doctrines. We must condemn those doctrines, and not give any kind of aid or encouragement to those who bring them. Otherwise we too would deserve condemnation.

Remember, we are soldiers of God in the great spiritual war created by his enemies against him. We must not give any kind of support or encouragement to his enemies, unless of course they quit being his enemy, stop sinning against him, and obey his Son Jesus Christ.

## Hoping to come to you

- **Having many things, I did not want to write to you by paper and ink, but I hope to come to you, and to speak mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be filled. The children of thy chosen sister salute thee. Truly** (Second John 1:12-13).

Nothing is known about where John was or where that chosen lady lived. Nor is it known if he ever did come to her. What those "many things" John wanted to speak with her about are not known either. Although such things would no doubt be interesting to us, they are not important to know. What God has provided in the Bible is sufficient for us.

John spoke of their joy being filled by his coming to her. For those who love each other, the greatest joy in communicating is being together when speaking. And that will be one of our great joys in the afterlife, being able to speak in person with our Lord Jesus Christ and God our heavenly Father.

Sinners will never even be able to see God. For Jesus said, "**Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God**" (Matthew 5:8). However, every man will see Christ, because the book of Revelation says about him, "**Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even the men who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will wail against him. Yea, Truly**" (Revelation 1:7).

Nothing is known about the chosen sister of the chosen lady to whom this letter was written. Being called chosen probably means she too was a disciple of Christ. Since John only said the children of her chosen sister saluted her, that probably means her sister was deceased.

# A Commentary on The Third Letter of John

## To the beloved Gaius

- **The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth** (Third John 1:1).

John's first letter was written to all believers. His second and third letters were written to individuals: one to a woman and her children, and the other to a man. The chronological order of those three letters is not known. They may actually have been written at the same time. But such things are not important for us to know.

As in his letter to the chosen lady and her children, John refers to himself in this letter as the elder. And nowhere in either of the three letters does John mention his own name. 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 about his authorship.

There were at least three and perhaps four men named Gaius who are mentioned in the New Testament. One is mentioned in the book of Acts. Another one is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Romans, and third one in his first letter to the Corinthians. I write more about those men in my commentary about the book of Romans (see 16:21-23).

John called Gaius the beloved, and he said he loved him in truth. Remember, in John's letter to the lady and her children, John said, **"The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who know the truth, because of the truth that abides in us, and will be with us into the age"** (Second John 1:1-2). We should love each other genuinely and sincerely, and because we are of the truth.

## Prospering

- **Beloved, I pray for thee to prosper concerning all things, and to be healthy, just as thy soul prospers** (Third John 1:2).

God wants us to have good physical health and material prosperity as well as a healthy soul and spiritual prosperity. And God's commandments are designed to do just that. Remember these wise words of Solomon: **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"** (Proverbs 14:34). And righteousness will do the same to individuals, unless injustice and oppressions rob it of them, because Solomon also said, **"Much food is in the tillage of the poor, but there is that is consumed because of injustice"** (Proverbs 13:23).

## Walking in truth

- **For I rejoiced exceedingly of brothers coming and testifying to the truth of thee, just as thou walk in truth. I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear my children walking in truth** (Third John 1:3-4).

The soul of Gaius was prospering because he walked in truth, and our soul will prosper when we walk in truth. Remember, walking in truth means living righteously according to the will of God. John said that when he heard that Gaius was walking in truth he rejoiced exceedingly.

In his letter to the chosen lady and her children, John also said he rejoiced exceedingly for the same reason: **“I rejoice exceedingly that I have found of thy children walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father”** (Second John 1:4).

Remember, John uses the word children in a spiritual sense, to refer to his brothers and sisters in Christ. And he said he had no greater joy than hearing his children were walking in truth. The word truth refers not just to that which is factual, but to all the ways of righteousness.

That is why Jesus said such things as, **“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, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me”** (John 14:6).

Regarding joy, there is no greater joy for every righteous father and mother than to know that their children are walking in truth. And I have no doubt that God our heavenly Father has no greater joy than to know that his children are walking in truth. Therefore, if you genuinely love God and want to give him joy, then walk in truth, in all the ways of righteousness.

John heard that Gaius was walking in truth because brothers had come and testified to the truth of Gaius. And we need to testify to each other about how other disciples are walking in truth. Moreover, we need to inform each other how that knowledge gives us no greater joy. Those who love each other share good news about each other, and they also share their feelings. Remember, as members of his kingdom, the church, we are all part of the one body of Christ upon the earth. As Paul said about him, **“...we are parts of his body, of his flesh and of his bones”** (Ephesians 5:30).

## Working for the brothers and for strangers

- **Beloved, thou do a faithful thing, whatever thou work for the brothers and for strangers, who testified about thy love in sight of the congregation, whom thou will do well sending forth worthily of God. For they went forth on behalf of the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to welcome such men, so that we might become fellow workmen for the truth** (Third John 1:5-8).

Nothing is said about who those brothers and strangers were. However, John said that Gaius would do well sending forth those men worthily of God. Doing things worthily of God means doing our very best. And John said the reason Gaius should do his very best sending forth those men is because they went forth on behalf of the Name (the name of Christ). That means those brothers and strangers were disciples of Christ who were evangelizing.

John said those men took nothing from the Gentiles. That means they did not accept any kind of help from the Gentiles. John is no doubt referring to Gentiles who were unbelievers. For the Gentile converts of the early church often sent aid to the needy Christians in Israel (see for example, First Corinthians 16:1-3). From what John said about those men, it seems best when we are evangelizing that we should avoid taking contributions from unbelievers.

Regarding who those men were, perhaps John called those who were of Gaius' congregation, brothers, while those fellow disciples who were visiting them from other congregations he called strangers. Nevertheless, whoever they were John commended Gaius for whatever work he was doing for them. He called it a faithful thing. Being faithful means to be loyal and conscientious.

John did not know the details of how Gaius was working for them, but they had testified about the love he had **“in sight of the congregation.”** Notice how John did not say “in the congregation.” The reason is because a little farther in this letter John tells how a man named Diotrephes had made himself head of the congregation and rejected the authority of the apostles. John also said about him, **“... he himself does not even accept the brothers, and he forbids those who would, and expels them out of the congregation”** (Third John 1:10).

Nevertheless, the good work of Gaius was not hidden, because his love was **“in sight of the congregation.”** That means the good work and the kindness that he was doing for them was known by the entire congregation, even though Diotrephes did not accept them. The congregation saw what Gaius was doing and the love he had for them.

Using the good example of Gaius about helping evangelists, John said, **“Therefore, we ought to welcome such men, so that we might become fellow workmen for the truth.”** Those men were workmen for the truth, and we should always welcome such men. We should welcome them, so that we can become fellow workmen for the truth with them. We would be doing a faithful thing, whatever we would work for them. And whatever work we do to further the cause of Christ is a faithful thing.

## Diotrephes

- **I wrote to the congregation, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first of them, did not accept us** (Third John 1:9).

This is the only place in the Bible that mentions Diotrephes. The letter that John wrote to that congregation has been lost. Hence, we know nothing about its contents. However, we do know that Diotrephes rejected what it said, because John says he did not accept them. That means Diotrephes would not receive them in any way.

He would not receive them because he loved to be first of those in the congregation. That means he loved to rule over them. That attitude of “one man rule” began to dominate the congregations together with the invention of the office of Bishop. The Bible says nothing about such an office. Indeed, it condemns any such position in the church.

Nevertheless, aggressive and domineering disciples began to create that office, and before long the Bishop began to dictate everything about their faith, just as Diotrephes did. Those

Bishops began to promote the idea of apostolic succession, which means they took for themselves authority over what the apostles taught. They justified themselves by saying the church during the time of the apostles was the “primitive” church. And therefore, they were advancing it with the authority of their teachings. Such men are liars and disciples of the devil.

Paul warned about men like Diotrefes, when he said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, **“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).

And now there are many men who speak distorted things, not the truth of what is taught in the word of God. And they have drawn away many believers after them. Indeed, I can confidently say that most believers now have been led astray by such men. Study the Bible carefully and your eyes will be opened about it.

### His evil works

- **Because of this, if I come, I will remember his works that he does, prating against us with evil words. And not being satisfied in these, he himself does not even accept the brothers, and he forbids those who would, and expels them out of the congregation** (Third John 1:10).

Paul spoke of enemies he had at the church in Corinth, including some that he said were **“false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into apostles of Christ”** (Second Corinthians 11:13). In his first letter to the church at Corinth he warned about coming and combating those arrogant men.

Those men were apparently telling the people not to expect to see Paul again. However, Paul said to them in his letter, **“But as of me not coming to you, some men are puffed up. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord should will, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power”** (First Corinthians 4:18-19).

John did not say he was definitely coming to the congregation that was under the power of Diotrefes. However, he did warn them that if he did come he would remember the works of Diotrefes. And that no doubt means he would use the power that Jesus gave him to punish that evil man.

Remember how Paul used the power of the Holy Spirit against a man who was opposing him: **“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”** (Acts 13:9-11).

## Imitate the good not the evil

- **Beloved, do not imitate the evil, but the good. The man doing right is of God. The man doing wrong has not seen God** (Third John 1:11).

To imitate means to copy and repeat. Much of what we learn in life is by imitation. For example, that is how we learn to speak. And by imitating the good that helps us become good. Imitating the evil causes us to become evil. And because it is natural to imitate those we associate with, Paul said, **“Be not led astray. Evil associations corrupt good habits”** (First Corinthians 15:33).

Regarding the matter of seeing God, no man can see the body of God with his eyes, but we can see his Spirit with our minds. Remember what Jesus said when Phillip asked him to show them 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).

When we learn about Jesus, we are seeing what God the Father is like. We are seeing his Spirit in our minds. And the man doing wrong has not seen God. He does not see the marvelous Spirit of God because his eyes are blinded by his sinful life.

## Demetrius

- **Demetrius has been testified by all, and by the truth itself. But we also testify, and ye know that our testimony is true** (Third John 1:12).

Another man named Demetrius was an enemy of Paul, stirring up a riot in the city of Ephesus against him (see Acts 19:23-41). Demetrius the silversmith resented Paul because he was a threat to his business of making idols. The Demetrius mentioned in this letter is certainly not that silversmith, because nothing good is ever said about that man.

As he had with Gaius, John said he had good testimony about Demetrius. That testimony was

- by all
- by the truth itself
- by John and those with him.

What John meant by all was all the disciples who had any kind of testimony about Demetrius; all the disciples spoke well of him.

What John no doubt meant by Demetrius being testified by the truth itself, was that Demetrius was living according to the truth. And when we know the truth from the words of the Bible, we can compare what it teaches to the behavior of any man. That way we too can receive testimony from the truth about anyone.

John and those with him also knew Demetrius personally. Hence, they too could testify of him. Although this letter begins by saying it was to the beloved Gaius, it was apparently intended to be for other Christians with him, probably including the congregation there.

And since they knew John, he reminded them that they knew his testimony was true, and also that of those with him. Remember, God had given his apostles special powers of the Holy Spirit to prove they were from God. And John no doubt used those powers to prove to those people with Gaius that their testimony was true.

## Many things to write

- **I had many things to write, but I did not want to write to thee by pen and ink. But I hope to see thee straightaway, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name** (Third John 1:13-14).

John was hoping to be able to see Gaius personally, and he hoped to see him soon. He said there were many things he wanted to say to him, but did not want to say them by writing. There are advantages and disadvantages to writing, and there are advantages and disadvantages to speaking mouth to mouth. Whatever were the many things John wanted to say to Gaius, they were better said to him in person. Hence, we have no record of those things, which God obviously determined were unnecessary for us to know.

John closed his short letter to Gaius by calling for peace to him. Peace is the ultimate goal of all righteousness, although conflict against evil is often needed to achieve it. The blessing of peace can only be enjoyed after evil is defeated. And genuine peace always includes the freedom to live righteously and creatively.

Who were the friends that John mentioned is not known. A friend is someone we know and like personally, or have known that way; although the word friend is sometimes used to contrast with the word enemy. As disciples of Christ we are all spiritual brothers who love each other. However, we are not all friends in the sense of a personal association.

During the last supper, Jesus told his apostles they were his friends if they obeyed all of his commandments: **“Greater love has no man than this, that some man lay down his life for his friends. 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 15:13-15).

Jesus was not just speaking to those men; he was speaking to us all. We can become his friends—if we do as many things as he commanded us. That is just another example of the many places in the Bible that emphasize the necessity of obedience to all of God’s will for us. Most of those who claim to believe in God, pick and choose the commandments they want to obey. And by so doing they are showing how they are not his friends.

The friends that John spoke about sent their salute to Gaius by this letter, and John asked Gaius to salute them. John did not name those friends, but he told Gaius to salute them by name. That indicates those men were of a limited number.

Paul often saluted people in his letters, and he almost always mentioned them by name. Our name represents our identity. And when people use our name they are being personal with us. And it makes us feel better when people greet us personally. And it facilitates a stronger bond. Hence, John wanted Gaius to salute those friends by name.

# A Commentary on The Letter of Jude

## Jude calls for a blessing

- **Jude, a bondman of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the called, sanctified in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied** (Jude 1:1-2).

This is the only place in the Bible that mentions the name Jude. Jude says he was a brother of James. The name James is only found in the New Testament, and there were five different men with that name. I comment about James at the beginning of his book.

Who Jude was is not known, and I choose not to conjecture about it. The early Christians included this book when they compiled the New Testament, and that decision has held ever since. Therefore, I will attend to the divinely inspired words that Jude wrote, and not worry about specifically who he was.

Jude called himself a bondman of Jesus Christ, as well as brother of James. Paul, James, and Peter all called themselves bondmen of Christ in the books they wrote. They were bondmen of Christ because they belonged to him and were serving him. And in that sense every disciple of Christ is a bondman of him. And that is an exceedingly great honor. Although most of us are not full time evangelists.

Jude addressed his book to the called, meaning those whom Jesus called out of the world to be his disciples. Paul also referred to the disciples of Christ as the called.

Jude also said we were sanctified in God the Father, and kept in Jesus Christ. Being sanctified means being set apart as holy. And as disciples of Christ, we are set apart from the world as holy men and priests of God.

Remember what Peter said about our priesthood: **“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).

We are kept for Jesus Christ to be with him in the kingdom of heaven after this life is over. As Peter also said, **“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 the 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).

Jude wrote this book to the called and sanctified in God, which means all of the disciples of Christ. And he called for a blessing of mercy and peace to us. He also called for love to us be multiplied. Although unstated, Jude called for those things from God who gives all good things. It is obvious Jude loved his fellow disciples

## Earnestly contend for the faith

- **Beloved, making all diligence to write to you about the common salvation, I had need to write to you exhorting you to earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the sanctified.**
- **For certain men have sneaked in, those written about formerly for this condemnation, irreverent men, perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness, and denying our only Master God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1:3-4).**

Jude called us beloved because God and Christ love us, and Jude also loved us. It was with haste that he wrote this book, **“making all diligence to write”** because of a threat to our common salvation, which salvation is the good news of Jesus Christ. For it is only through him that we can have salvation from the condemnation of our sins.

Jude said he needed to write and exhort us to earnestly contend for the faith, the faith that was once for all delivered to us the sanctified. The faith refers to the teachings of Christ and his good news of our salvation. And it was once for all delivered. Anything added to what Christ and his apostles taught is a perversion. What they taught was not “primitive,” as false teachers claim. It was complete and mature needing nothing more. It was once for all delivered to us. Let no man deceive you otherwise.

To earnestly contend means to strive and fight. And we need to strive and fight for the faith of our common salvation, because we are soldiers of God in a great spiritual warfare. Therefore, as Paul told Timothy, we must all **“Fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12).

Jude warned about a specific threat to our common salvation that required earnestly contending for the faith. He said certain men had sneaked in and were (1) perverting the grace of God into licentiousness, and (2) were denying our only Master God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those things have always been a threat to the righteousness of God. Therefore, the reason Jude made all diligence to warn in this book was probably because some were not contending against those things. Paul sometimes faced the same apathy toward the threat against our faith.

For example, here is what he wrote to the congregation at Corinth: **“But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent enticed Eve by his craftiness, so your thoughts might be corrupted from the simplicity in the Christ. For indeed if a man who comes, preaches another Jesus whom we did not preach, or ye receive another spirit that ye did not receive, or another good news that ye did not accept, ye well tolerated it”** (Second Corinthians 11:3-4).

And here is what he wrote to the brothers in 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”** (Galatians 1:6-7).

There have been and always will be irreverent men who pervert the grace of God into licentiousness, and deny our only Master God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. For example, not long ago I read a news report about a theologian at some well known university who argued that the Bible does not teach homosexuality is a sin. I continue to marvel at how such irreverent men pervert the word of God into licentiousness.

An example reported in the Bible of perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness was the story of a woman named Jezebel who was with the congregation in Thyatira. Jesus sent a message to them about her, saying, **“Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou tolerate thy woman Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my bondmen to fornicate, and to eat idol sacrifices”** (Revelation 2:20).

Denying our only Master God and our Lord Jesus Christ is now commonly taught by modern theologians. In place of our only Master God they fabricate their own concept of what they think God should be like. And they scoff at the word of God, the Bible, accusing it of being filled with myths, errors, and contradictions. They also deny that Jesus is the Son of God.

Almighty God is our only Master, and Jesus Christ is our only Lord and Savior, whether men accept them or not. But the time is coming when those who rebel against them will no longer have that choice. They can deny them now, disobey their commandments, and scoff at the word of God, but such men will burn in the prison of hell when their lives are over. Jude said those irreverent men were written about formerly for condemnation. The Bible is filled with warnings about the destruction of such irreverent men.

Jude also said such men had sneaked in. That means they did not reveal to the disciples what they really were. Paul wrote about how such men disguise themselves in a cloak of righteousness, 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).

I have learned about many men who through the centuries have seemed to be super pious by the way they appeared and by some of the things they said. Some of them have even been honored by the Catholics with their title of “saint.” However, their pious appearance and noble sounding words are a mask they use to sneak in with their perversions. They are like the proverbial poisoned apple. They look and sound good, but poison is interspersed with their pious words and actions. Dare expose them and you will see the vicious wrath of the devil in action against you.

## The example of ancient Israel

- **Now I want to remind you, ye having known this once, that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe** (Jude 1:5).

Those ancient Israelites frequently complained and rebelled against God and Moses who brought them out of their bondage in Egypt. And when they even refused to enter the

promised land, because they feared the Gentile inhabitants there, God cursed them to die in the wilderness. Here is what the Bible record says about it:

**“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).

When the people heard those words they repented and said they would obey God and enter the land. But it was too late. Jehovah did not take away his curse against them. Every one of them died in the wilderness except Caleb and Joshua who had obeyed God.

Jude said he wanted to remind us of that history. That story is a warning to us.

## Heavenly agents who sinned

- **And the agents who did not keep their own principality, but left their own habitation, he has kept reserved in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day** (Jude 1:6).

Peter wrote a similar warning in his second book, 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, and he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, the eighth, a herald of righteousness, when he brought on a flood upon the world of the irreverent, and he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction, being reduced to ashes, having made an example of men who were going to be irreverent”** (Second Peter 2:4-6).

The agents (in heaven) who did not keep their own principality, but left their own habitation were obviously sinning against God. A principality is a rank or a territory. A habitation is a place of dwelling. When God assigns us a rank or a territory or a place to dwell, we have no right to change it. For civilization requires various ranks and territories. Disorder is the natural consequence of violating those things. It is like cancer to the society.

A modern example of a principality and a habitation is the role of men and women. During this adulterous generation that has forsaken God, many men and women now frequently fail to keep their roles as men and women. Women now commonly dress and act like men. They have even persuaded our rulers to force the country to allow women to have fully equal rights and opportunities with men. Some men and women have even undergone radical surgery to alter their bodies in an attempt to change the appearance of their gender.

That warning by Jude clearly says those who do such things will be punished the same way as the agents of heaven who sinned. They will be kept reserved in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. That probably refers to the place called Hades.

Peter spoke of spirits in prison, when he told what Jesus did in the spiritual world after his resurrection: **“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 3:19-20). And that prison is probably Hades.

The judgment of the great day is when all sinners will be judged after this world is over.

## The example of Sodom and Gomorrah

- **As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, the same kind of way with these who indulged in fornication, and who went rear of queer flesh, are set forth an example, undergoing the punishment of eternal fire** (Jude 1:7).

Remember, Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah after his two agents rescued Lot and his family who were living in Sodom. As 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).

Righteous Lot, who lived in Sodom, invited the two agents of God into his house, knowing only that they were strangers to the city. The record says, **“And he made a feast for them, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, encompassed the house around, both young and old, all the people from every quarter. And they called to Lot, and said to him, Where are the men who came in to thee this night? Bring them out to us, that we may know them”** (Genesis 19:3-5).

The men of Sodom wanted to “know” those two strangers. In the Bible the word “know” can sometimes mean having sexual intercourse. And that is exactly what those men of Sodom wanted. They wanted to commit anal sex with those two agents. Hence, that kind of sexual intercourse is now called “sodomy.” It is a perverted and filthy form of fornication.

And that is what Jude means by going “rear of queer flesh.” Going rear means entering the anus. And queer flesh refers to the perversion of homosexuality. And even now homosexuals are referred to as “queers.” Indeed, they refer to themselves that way.

But God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire. And he will destroy the soul of every unrepentant homosexual with the punishment of eternal fire.

## Corrupted men

- **Nevertheless in the same way also these men who fantasize, they actually defile their flesh** (Jude 1:8).

Jude now describes another kind of sinner: those who fantasize, and even defile their own flesh. Jude is referring to men who use their minds to imagine all kinds of perverse and evil things. And they defile their flesh in all kinds of ways, including many kinds of sex perversions, tattoos and scars, grotesque hair styles, dangerous thrill seeking, drunkenness and drug abuse.

## Michael the arch-agent

- **Moreover, they reject lordship and speak evil of dignities. But Michael the arch-agent, when he disputed with the devil, contending about the body of Moses, dared not bring a railing judgment, but said, May the Lord rebuke thee** (Jude 1:8-9).

Those sinners also reject lordship and speak evil of dignities. Rejecting lordship means rebelling against any kind of authority. They prefer to live lawlessly like wild animals. Therefore, they speak evil of anything that is dignified, anything that is noble, honorable, good and right and just. They hate such things, and they mock and scoff at them. Their minds are always in the gutter.

Regarding Michael, the book of Daniel describes what Daniel was told about Michael by other heavenly agents. One of those agents said to Daniel that he was in a struggle with **“the ruler of the kingdom of Persia ... but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me”** (Daniel 10:13). That agent who helped him was called Michael **“your prince”** (Daniel 10:21). And later Michael was called **“the great prince who stands for the sons of thy people”** (Daniel 12:1), meaning the people of Israel.

Jude said that Michael was **“the arch-agent.”** That probably means Michael was the chief of all the agents in heaven. More evidence for that is when the book of Revelation describes the time the devil was cast out of heaven. That happened after Jesus completed his victory over sin with his life on the earth of perfect obedience to God.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the record 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”** (Revelation 12:7-9).

Jude said that Michael, who had great power and authority, did not bring a railing judgment against the devil when he disputed with him. He simply called upon the Lord to rebuke the devil. That probably happened before the devil was cast out of heaven.

Why Michael contended with the devil about the body of Moses is not told. I can only conjecture. Remember how God cursed the devil (the serpent) because he tempted Eve and deceived her: **“Because thou have done this, cursed are thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. Upon thy belly thou shall go, and dust thou shall eat all the days of thy life”** (Genesis 3:14).

Perhaps that means the devil could only get his sustenance from things of the earth. That would mean the devil wanted to feed upon the deceased body of Moses—that “dust” of which we are all made. How that would happen is a mystery. Perhaps the devil can get energy from fire, and he wanted to “consume” the body of Moses that way. Nevertheless, the devil had no right to the body of Moses. Hence, Michael contended with him about it.

### Like irrational beasts

- **But these men indeed revile whatever they have not seen. But whatever they understand naturally, as the irrational beasts, in these things they are corrupted** (Jude 1:10).

Degenerate men commonly revile whatever they have not seen. They scoff and ridicule anything of faith. They are fools who live only for the present. If they cannot see it they scoff about it. They are like the irrational beasts, creatures who cannot reason. Understanding things naturally probably refers to living by instinct, without acquired knowledge.

Thus, their comprehension of things is exceedingly narrow and limited. And they are blind to the greater spiritual reality revealed in God’s word. Such men have chosen to be that way. As the book of Proverbs says, **“How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And scoffers delight them in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?”** (Proverbs 1:22). Like pigs in the mud, they are stupid creatures who love to wallow in the mire of their sins and corruption.

### Woe to them

- **Woe to them! Because they went in the way of Cain, and rushed to the error of Balaam’s reward, and perished in the rebellion of Korah** (Jude 1:11).

Remember the story of Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. He murdered his brother Abel: **“And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from Jehovah. And again she bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.**

**“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering to Jehovah of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offering, but he did not have respect to Cain and to his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. And Jehovah said to Cain, Why are thou angry? And why has thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou do not well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire shall be for thee, and thou shall rule over it.**

**“And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him. And Jehovah said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper?”** (Genesis 4:1-9). Cain murdered Abel because his own works were wrong and his brother’s were right.

Regarding Balaam, the Bible says he **“taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, even to eat idol sacrifices, and to fornicate”** (Revelation 2:14). Balak was the king of Moab, and he was terrified that Israel was going to destroy them with the Canaanites. Israel was not going to invade Moab (the nation of Moab was of the descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew). But Balak did not know that, and so he hired a prophet named Balaam to curse Israel.

God forbid Balaam to curse Israel, but Balaam found another way to hurt them. And that is described in the above passage from Revelation. Balaam knew that Israel would be weakened if they sinned against God. Hence, he taught Balak to send women to tempt the sons of Israel to sin. Because of that God commanded Israel to destroy Moab, and Balaam was killed in that war.

The rebellion of Korah was about Levites who resented the leadership of Moses and were envious of Aaron the high priest. That was during the time of the wilderness wanderings. Here is part of that story: **“And Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. So they got up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side. And Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood at the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little ones.**

**“And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that Jehovah has sent me to do all these works, for it is not of my own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then Jehovah has not sent me. But if Jehovah makes a new thing, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that pertains to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then ye shall understand that these men have despised Jehovah.**

**“And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground split asunder that was under them, and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that pertained to Korah, and all their goods. So they, and all that pertained to them, went down alive into Sheol. And the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them, for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up”** (Numbers 16:25-34).

Yet amazingly, the people of Israel blamed Moses and Aaron for destroying Korah and his cohorts: **“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). That is just another example to show why God eventually cursed that generation to die in the wilderness.

## The wretchedness of those sinners

- **These are reefs in your love-feasts, feasting together, fearlessly tending to themselves, waterless clouds carried along by winds, autumn trees without fruit, who died twice having been uprooted, wild waves of the sea foaming out their own shame, wandering stars for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved into an age** (Jude 1:12-13).

A reef is a hidden ridge just below the surface of the water. Reefs are dreaded by seamen because countless ships have been sunk and lives lost because of collisions with reefs. Jude called those sinful men that he was describing, reefs in their love-feasts.

This is the only place in the Bible that mentions love-feasts. The word probably refers to social gatherings among the disciples of Christ where they enjoyed a meal together. Those evil men were feasting together with the disciples, but were hidden threats like reefs are to ships, hidden threats to their unity and camaraderie.

Jude mentions five characteristics of those men. He said they were

fearlessly tending to themselves  
 waterless clouds carried along by winds  
 autumn trees without fruit, who died twice having been uprooted  
 wild waves of the sea foaming out their own shame  
 wandering stars for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved into an age

Fearlessly tending to themselves means they were selfish men, full of self-confidence and promoting themselves. Being waterless clouds carried along by winds means they were useless boasters and opportunists moving themselves about according to whatever were the present circumstances, always wanting to look good, but never doing any good.

Autumn trees without fruit provide neither shade nor anything to eat, being completely useless in that condition. Dying twice for a tree may mean first being uprooted and then rotting. Those evil men were so useless that they were like rotten trees that had been uprooted.

Seamen also fear the wild waves of the sea, because they too have caused countless ships to sink and men to drown. Wild waves produce what are called whitecaps on top of them, which is like the foam from the mouths of rabid animals. Those evil men, being like reefs and wild waves, were dangerous threats to the health and progress of the church.

The other planets of our solar system that orbit the sun were called wandering stars in ancient times because they did not follow the predictable movements of the stars in the sky. Remember, in ancient times all the bright spots of the heavens were called stars. They had no knowledge of the other planets. It was not until the sixteenth century when a Prussian named Copernicus discovered that those wandering stars were not stars at all, and they did not wander. Jude was not referring to the planets.

Most of the stars are organized together in groups. The largest groups are called galaxies, the smallest of which contain millions of stars, while the largest contain billions of them. However, there are stars that do not belong to any group. They are called intergalactic stars. They are no doubt the wandering stars that the divinely inspired writer Jude meant.

Not being in groups probably means those wandering or intergalactic stars are in the darkest parts of the universe. Jude is calling those wretched men wandering stars for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved. That gloom of darkness is hell. Even though hell is a fiery furnace, it is also a place of darkness.

Jesus called hell the outer darkness, when he said, **“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).

Being reserved into an age means hell has been set aside waiting for the new age of the new heaven and earth after this one is over. The gloom of darkness has been reserved and is waiting for such sinners.

### Enoch prophesied about these men

- **And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men, saying, Behold, The Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the irreverent of them about all the works of their own irreverence that they have done irreverently, and about all the harsh things that irreverent sinners spoke against him** (Jude 1:14-15).

Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam. That is shown in the genealogy of Christ given in Luke’s biography of him: **“Enoch [was] 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 3:37-38).

The prophecy from Enoch quoted by Jude is not found in the Old Testament. All we know about Enoch from the Old Testament is this passage: **“And Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah three hundred years, and begot sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him”** (Genesis 5:21-24).

That means Enoch was a very righteous man, so righteous that God took him directly to heaven even before his death. The Bible only mentions one other man who was taken by God without first dying: Elijah the prophet (see Second Kings 2:11). Of course, that does not mean they were the most righteous men who ever lived. But it does mean they were very righteous.

Jude said Enoch was a prophet and was of a generation that was part of the antediluvian world, which God destroyed with a worldwide flood because of their wickedness. Enoch no doubt preached against the great wickedness of that time. And perhaps God took him from the earth that way to prove to the people that Enoch was a man of God and his words of warning were true.

The prophecy that Jude quoted is Enoch’s expression of God’s wrath against irreverent men. When Enoch said **“The Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all,”** he was prophesying of the great day of judgment after this world is over.

Jesus spoke of that, when he said, **“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).

Enoch’s prophecy is primarily about unrepentant sinners. And he emphasized their irreverence by using that word four times in his brief statement. Being irreverent means not showing proper honor and respect. Being irreverent includes things like rejecting lordship and speaking evil of dignities, which Jude mentioned earlier.

Enoch said the Lord came to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the irreverent of them. To execute judgment against and to convict means to prove they are guilty and condemn them. That is what will happen to the “goats” that Jesus will separate from his “sheep.” He will say to them, **“Depart from me, ye accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his agents”** (Matthew 25:41).

Jude said they will be judged and convicted because of **“all the works of their own irreverence that they have done irreverently, and about all the harsh things that irreverent sinners spoke against him.”** They will be condemned because their irreverence produced irreverent works. Their irreverent attitude toward the Lord caused them to do irreverent things, and do them irreverently.

Paul also wrote about the wrath of God. He said it would be **“revealed from heaven against all irreverence and unrighteousness of men ...”** (Romans 1:18). Among other things about that, Paul said, **“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.**

**“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 1:21-25). Paul went on to describe in detail how irreverent and wicked they were.

The prophecy of Enoch also mentioned all the harsh things that irreverent sinners spoke against the Lord. It is very common during this most adulterous generation of Americans to speak harshly against the Lord. Whenever sinners cause harm, destruction, and death, they blame him. Whenever they must struggle against difficulties, they blame him. Whenever they suffer because of their guilt, they blame him. Some of them even curse him. But God will judge and convict them. On the day of judgment he will prove they are the guilty ones, and he is always good and right and just.

From the words of Enoch’s prophecy, it is clear that he was very angry with those irreverent men. And I suspect he was persecuted severely because of his preaching. Wicked men have always persecuted the righteous, especially those who preach against them.

## How and why they act

- **These are grumblers, fault-finders, going according to their lusts, and their mouth speaks overblown things, marveling personages for the sake of advantage** (Jude 1:16).

The sons of Israel whom God brought out of Egypt were grumblers and fault-finders. Here are a few examples of it from the Bible record:

**And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?** (Exodus 15:24).

**And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness. And the sons of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of Jehovah in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we ate bread to the full, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger** (Exodus 16:2-3).

**And all the sons of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron. And the whole congregation said to them, Would that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why does Jehovah bring us to this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey. Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?** (Numbers 14:2).

Jude said that irreverent men

are grumblers and fault-finders (murmurers)  
 they go according to their lusts  
 they speak overblown things  
 they marvel personages for the sake of advantage.

Grumblers and fault-finders are men who constantly complain about any challenges and difficulties they may face, and they blame everybody but themselves. Going according to their lusts means they lived to indulge them. Speaking overblown things includes arrogant boasting, and making extravagant and unrealistic claims. Marveling personages for the sake of advantage means they ingratiate themselves and flatter the rich, the famous, and the influential people in order to get special privileges and obtain things from them.

All such things are condemned by God. And those who do them will be condemned because of it.

## World-soul men

- **But ye, beloved, remember the sayings previously spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they told you that there will be scoffers during the last time, going according to their own desires of irreverences. These are those who make divisions, world-soul men, not having the Spirit** (Jude 1:17-19).

What Jude meant by “the last time” is what we call the future. John spoke of the antichrist (the spirit of denial that Jesus is the Son of God) coming in the future. And now Jude

speaks of scoffers coming in the future. Scoffers are men with a more aggressive spirit of antichrist. To scoff means to openly show scorn and contempt for something.

The rulers of the Jews scoffed at Jesus while he was suffering on the cross, as this passage says: **“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”** (Matthew 27:41-43).

With the decline of faith in God and Christ in America the number of scoffers has increased. And in the same way the severity of their scoffing has increased. They are arrogant fools who believe only in themselves. Jude said they were going according to their own desires of irreverences. Remember, being irreverent means not showing proper honor and respect. Scoffers enjoy being irreverent. Apparently they get some kind of morbid pleasure in scoffing and being irreverent. But they will pay a bitter price in the afterlife.

Jude said they were those who make divisions. Solomon also said about them, **“Scoffers set a city in a flame, but wise men turn away wrath”** (Proverbs 29:8). Scoffing is an attack against law and order by destroying respect for it. Those Jews who scoffed at Christ were attacking God and his will for us, and they helped bring about the eventual destruction of Israel. Those who scoff about Christ and his good news of our salvation contribute to the breakdown of morality and righteousness.

The word world-soul refers to the basic character of the world, which is division, conflict, and strife. Not only do men and animals engage in conflict and strife, but the very elements themselves do the same. That is the soul of the world because it is a world filled with rebellion against God, who alone can bring peace and harmony.

Scoffers are world-soul men, setting cities in a flame by fomenting riots and wars. They do not have the Spirit of God in them. Dear brothers, do not tolerate scoffers. If you are able, heed Solomon’s advice and get rid of them: **“Cast out the scoffer, and contention will go out, yea, strife and reproach will cease”** (Proverbs 22:10).

## Build up yourselves in your faith

- **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** (Jude 1:20-21).

Scoffers tear things down and divide people. Our faith in Christ unites and builds us up. Our faith is a most holy faith, because it is faith in Almighty God, our Holy Father in heaven. Remember, holiness is purity, and our faith is in purity and truth and righteousness, which are the highest and noblest of things, things that build up, unite, and exalt.

Jude commanded us to also pray in the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, helping guide our lives. Praying in the Holy Spirit means praying in purity and righteousness, having nothing unclean or unrighteous in our prayers. We are to pray to God through Christ, because he is our mediator (see First Timothy 2:5). But we are to pray in the Holy Spirit, praying in purity and righteousness.

Jude also said we were to keep ourselves in the love of God. And the only way to do that is to always be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his good news of salvation. That way we will remain children of God, beloved by him. Do not think you can forsake Christ and remain in the love of God.

As every man knows, the world is a trouble-filled place of sin and death. And for every disciple of Christ it is not our home. Our home is in heaven, and we await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. And that hope will be realized—if we remain faithful to the Son of God and his church.

### On some be ye merciful

- **And on some be ye merciful—being discerning. And in fear save some, snatching them out of the fire, hating even the garment that was stained by the flesh** (Jude 1:22-23).

In the previous passage Jude spoke about ourselves: building up ourselves and keeping ourselves in the love of God. In this passage Jude speaks about some others: being merciful on some and saving some. Notice he used the word some. For not every man is worthy of mercy or salvation. Remember, Jesus made no attempt to save the evil man Herod; he would not answer his questions or even speak to him (see Luke 23:9).

Therefore, Jude commanded us to be discerning with our mercy. Remember what James said about mercy: **“For the judgment is without mercy to him who did no mercy”** (James 2:13). Only those who genuinely repent of their sins and do works worthy of repentance are worthy of receiving the mercy of salvation.

For the worthy souls, we should save them in fear. Remember, there are different kinds of fear. The kind of fear we should have when we save others is the same kind of fear we should have toward God. Fearing God means to be in awe of his greatness, to be reverently respectful of him, and to be aware of his mighty power to reward and to punish. And saving some in fear means being aware that we too could lose our souls and be cast into the eternal fires of hell.

Snatching them out of the fire means both the figurative fire of sin and the literal fire of hell. If we persuade them to repent of their sins we are snatching them out of that spiritual fire. And in that way we are saving their souls from the literal fire of hell.

Jude told us to hate even the garment that was stained by the flesh. Sin is always defiling. And there are many sins of the flesh that not only defile our spirit but they defile even the clothes we wear. Examples are drunkenness, fornication, and wild revelry.

### To the only wise God our Savior

- **Now to him who is able to keep us non-stumbling, and to present before his glory, unblemished in gladness, to the only wise God our Savior, is glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and into all the ages. Truly** (Jude 1:24-25).

It is God our heavenly Father who is able to keep us non-stumbling. Stumbling makes it easier to fall. And God is able to keep us protected from the dangers of falling, falling away from him into the darkness of sin. He is able to do it in countless way because of his wisdom and his power. But if we do stumble, he will chasten us. For Jesus said to the congregation in Laodicea, which he rebuked for being lukewarm, **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent”** (Revelation 3:19).

By keeping us non-stumbling, God will present us before his glory in the next life, unblemished in gladness. Only Jesus Christ is able to make us righteous before God, holy and unblemished. And he will only do it to those who faithfully believe and obey him.

In that great new world we will be unblemished in gladness. Being cleansed by the blood of Christ, we will be unblemished. We will see his glory, and he will even share it with us in heaven. Consequently, we will have great gladness there. We will have great gladness because God promise it to all who love and obey him.

Jude concludes his book by calling for glory, majesty, dominion and power to God, whom he said was the only wise God our Savior. Paul also spoke of God being the only wise God when he said to the brothers at Rome, **“... to the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory into the ages. Truly”** (Romans 16:27). And he wrote these beautiful words to Timothy: **“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).

In his great vision of heaven, the apostle John heard souls praising God and Christ there: **“And I looked, and I heard as a voice of many agents all around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands, saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that has been killed to receive the power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!**

**“And every creature that is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and is in the sea, and things in them all, I heard saying, The blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion is to him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, into the ages of the ages. Truly!”** (Revelation 5:11-13).

Both now and into all the ages means forever and ever. And every one of us should call for **“glory, majesty, dominion and power to the only wise God our Savior,”** not only when we go to heaven, but every day we live upon the earth.



# A Commentary on The Revelation to John

## What must happen quickly

- **The Revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave him to show his bondmen what must happen quickly** (Revelation 1:1).

This book is a revelation of future events. However, it is not limited to the future, because it also speaks of past and present events. Indeed, much of the book is about cyclical or recurring events, ones that have happened in the past and will happen in the future. The most familiar of such cyclical events are things like day and night, life and death, war and peace. Those things described in the book of Revelation reveal the nature of our world, its pattern of events, and why it is that way.

Notice how that first passage says God is who gave the revelation to Jesus Christ. It originated with the Father, and he gave it to his Son for him to give to us his bondmen. That too is a recurring pattern. And we who are the disciples of Christ are his bondmen because it is our duty to serve and obey him.

Regarding the words “**what must happen quickly.**” That does not mean all of the events mentioned in this book were to happen during John’s lifetime. I believe what is meant by happen quickly is that the special revelation John was going to record for us would happen quickly. All of the events of that complex revelation, which are described in this great book, needed to happen quickly so that the bondmen of Christ would have it.

All of those events themselves could not have happened quickly because part of that revelation includes the end of the world, the final judgment, and our living with God and Christ in the New Jerusalem of heaven. And those things have still not happened.

## The testimony of John

- **And he signified it, having sent by his agent to his bondman John who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, as many things as he saw** (Revelation 1:1-2).

Not only did Jesus appear and speak with John (described in Revelation 1:9-20), but he also send a heavenly agent to testify to him. That agent testified to John the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Those things were revealed to John in all of the things that he saw in his great vision of heaven. And most of this book is a description of those things.

## A special blessing

- **Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and who keep the things written in it, for the time is near** (Revelation 1:3).

This is the only one of the sixty-six books of the Bible that gives such a blessing for those who hear its words and keep the things written in it. The things written in it that we should

keep are about our faith in God, and our love and obedience to him. Although the book of Revelation gives that special blessing, it is perhaps the most difficult book in the Bible to understand. It is difficult because it contains so much symbolism. Yet the basic theme and lessons of the book are clear to those who will read it.

The basic theme is that we are going to suffer in many ways in this world, including being persecuted by sinners. Yet we always have the final victory and blessing from God. It is a great book to encourage our perseverance.

The words **“the time is near”** warn us that we should not neglect reading the words of that prophecy. For what the words of that prophecy describe are many of the kinds of things that occur in every man’s lifetime. Therefore, we should learn what those words say to help keep us prepared for what we will face in life, as well as keeping us prepared for our ultimate salvation in heaven. And that salvation is truly near for each one of us, because 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).

## Grace to you and peace from God

- **John, to the seven congregations in Asia: Grace to you and peace from God, who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth** (Revelation 1:4-5).

John wrote specifically to seven congregation in Asia. He wrote specifically to them because that is what Jesus commanded him (see Revelation 2). Nevertheless, the messages to them give good lessons for us all. After that John described his vision of heaven, about which I make many conjectures because of all the symbolism.

John then called for a blessing of grace and peace (1) from God, (2) from the seven Spirits, and (3) from Jesus Christ. I believe the reason John included the seven Spirits with God and his Son, was to introduce the reader to those Spirits, and to indicate how important they are. For those seven Spirits are mentioned in no other book in the Bible. I speak much more about them in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

John said that God is, and was, and is coming. God exists now; he has always existed in the past; and he will always exist in the future, which means we should prepare for that future when it comes.

John said the seven Spirits are before God’s throne. God’s throne is not a mere seat; it is a great command center from which he maintains all things. And he uses those seven Spirits to both power all things and be aware of all things. A spirit is energy, and those seven Spirits are a special kind of radiant energy that God uses both to energize and to communicate. I say more about them farther on.

John also spoke of Jesus being the faithful witness. He was a faithful witness of God for us, showing us what the Father is like, and how he wants us to live. And when John said that Christ was the firstborn of the dead, he was referring to Christ being the first raised from the dead to sit in the throne of God. And when this world is over all of his disciples will sit in the throne of God with him. For Jesus 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).

John also said that Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. Although he is their ruler, they have rebelled against him. Nevertheless, he still has the ultimate power and authority over them. Just as he has the ultimate power and authority over every man.

Paul told why Jesus is tolerating rebellion, and is not imposing his full power and authority now: **“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).

## He made us a kingdom

- **To him who loves us and washed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him is the glory and the dominion into the ages of the ages. Truly** (Revelation 1:5-6).

Who does Jesus love? He loves those who are his sheep. He loves them because they have made their spirits worthy of God’s grace. They are humble and open-minded, and they love God’s truth and righteousness. They are for God and not against him.

Remember this that Jesus said to God in his prayer during the last meeting with his apostles before his betrayal: **“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). And each man has the power make himself worthy of God’s grace.

Jesus washed us from our sins when he endured the ultimate sacrifice of being crucified. That climaxed his life of perfect obedience to God, which qualified him to redeem all who belong to him from the condemnation of their sins

Moreover, he united us all together in the eternal kingdom of God, which on the earth is the church. And he made us priests to God, serving him as he strives to save the lost souls of the world. Every faithful Christian is a priest to God. Those men who separate themselves among other believers, and say that only they are priests are liars. There is no such thing as laymen in the kingdom of God, because we are all priests.

Notice in that passage about Jesus how it says **“his God and Father.”** That is just one more example that shows how the trinity theory is false and full of contradictions.

## He comes with the clouds

- **Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even the men who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will wail against him. Yea, Truly** (Revelation 1:7).

Jesus will return in the clouds at the end of the world. And that will be the time of the great judgment when all men will stand before him to be judged, even the men who crucified him. All the tribes of the earth will wail against him because they have all been against

him. What nation of the world is for him? Not one. Therefore, they will all be condemned in the final judgment and will suffer.

Remember how Jesus warned about the final judgment: **“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 13:41-43).

## The Alpha and the Omega

- **I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, the God who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty** (Revelation 1:8).

Those words are about God the Father. Similar words are spoken farther in the book: **“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 21:5-7).

Nevertheless, Jesus also called himself the Alpha and the Omega, as in this passage: **“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. Blessed are those doing his commandments, so that their right will be to the tree of life, and they may enter in the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every man who loves and makes a lie.**

**“I, Jesus, have sent my agent to testify these things to you for the congregations. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star”** (Revelation 22:12-16).

The letters Alpha and Omega are the first and the last of the Greek alphabet. Since both the Father and the Son said they were the Alpha and the Omega, that probably means they are the origin of all things and they are the ultimate of all things. Both the Father and the Son also said they were the beginning and the end. That probably means both the Father and the Son began the world, and they will end the world.

## John on the isle called Patmos

- **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** (Revelation 1:9).

Regarding Patmos, here is what a Bible dictionary says about it:

Patmos, a tiny wind-swept island of the Spirades group, lying off the coast of Asia Minor in the Aegean Sea about 28 miles S of Samos. It is only ten miles long and six

miles wide at the broadest point, and its coastline is so irregular that it is only 25 miles in area. Being of volcanic origin, it is rocky and almost treeless. ... It was one of the many isolated places to which the Romans banished their exiles.<sup>1</sup>

Notice in the scripture how John said he was our brother and companion in the tribulation and perseverance in Christ Jesus. John wrote this book of revelation for us, not for the world. We are the ones who are suffering the tribulation of the persecution against us by the world. We are the ones who belong to the kingdom, the kingdom of God. And we are the ones who are persevering in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John said that he was on that island because of the word of God and because of the testimony of Jesus Christ. That was when the Roman rulers had begun to actively oppose the word of God and persecute those who were evangelizing the good news of Christ. But instead of taking John's life, they exiled him on that tiny island prison. But that did not keep God from using John to testify about Christ, because it was there that he wrote this great book of Revelation.

## Writing to the seven congregations

- **I became in spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a great voice like a trumpet saying, What thou see, write in a book and send to the seven congregations: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea** (Revelation 1:10-11).

When John said he became in spirit, he probably meant he was able to experience the spiritual world. That world is normally invisible to us. And by becoming in spirit he was able to see and hear things that he would not have otherwise.

Regarding the Lord's day, this is the only passage in the Bible that mentions that day, and it does not explain what it means. Traditionally, the Lord's day is considered Sunday, the first day of the week. However, there is no Bible evidence that is what John meant by that day. Hence, no man should dogmatically claim that Sunday is the Lord's day. For it could also mean something else. For example, it could refer to some annual day, such as the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection.

Much false teaching has resulted from claiming Sunday to be the Lord's day. For example, it has been taught that Sunday is the Christian sabbath, with all of the restrictions associated with a sabbath. The Bible says nothing about a Christian sabbath. There is no more a law commanding a Christian sabbath than there is a law commanding a Christian circumcision.

Nevertheless, regarding the sabbath, the principle of having one day of rest each week is a good one, a very good one. And likewise having congregational meetings each first day of the week is a good tradition, a very good one—but remember, those things are not commanded.

Modern men even enjoy a double blessing by having two days of rest from labor each week. The one given in the ten commandments for rest on the last day of each week. And

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1. Pictorial Bible Dictionary. Merrill C. Tenney, General Editor. The Southwestern Company, Nashville Tennessee, 1966.

one from the Christian tradition of rest on the first day of the week. Hence, the modern weekend is another blessing that owes its origin to Christians.

Regarding those seven congregations, four of them are only mentioned here in the book of Revelation: Smyrna, Pergamos (also called Pergamum), Sardis, and Philadelphia. Philadelphia is a Greek word for brotherly love, but that is irrelevant to anything in the Bible.

Ephesus is mentioned much in the New Testament. Indeed, one of Paul's letters is to the congregation in Ephesus. Thyatira is only mentioned as the city where Lydia sold her purple (see Acts 16:14).

Laodicea is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where he spoke well of some brothers there. He also spoke of a letter to the Laodiceans, of which we have no record. Here is what Paul said about it: **“And when the letter has been read among you, cause that it be read also in the congregation of Laodiceans, and that ye also read the one from Laodicea”** (Colossians 4:16).

Those seven congregations were all within about a hundred thirty miles of each other in the ancient province of Asia. There were other congregations there, but only those seven are mentioned here in the book of Revelation.

In the Bible, seven symbolizes completeness. And those particular congregations were probably chosen to represent the state of the church at that time, with their various virtues and vices. And also to give the warnings and blessings that were associated with their spiritual condition. All of which give valuable lessons to the church anywhere at any time.

## Jesus' heavenly appearance

- **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 1:15-16).

The person John saw that resembled a son of man was Jesus in his heavenly glory. And John gave a very vivid description of how Jesus appeared. The record later says those seven lampstands were the seven congregations, meaning they were symbols of them.

Notice how Jesus was standing in their midst. That means Jesus is always among us, even though we cannot see him. Remember what he said to his disciples: **“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”** (Matthew 18:20).

Jesus did not appear to John as a man of flesh, but he did appear to him in the form of a man, **“resembling a son of man.”** And since the Bible says Jesus is the exact image of the

essence of God, then the description that John gave about the appearance of Jesus also describes how God the Father appears.

For the book of Hebrews says, **“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. Who, being the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made purification of our sins through himself, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heights”** (Hebrews 1:1-3)

John described the heavenly body of Jesus as having a head, hair, eyes, a breast, hands, feet, and a mouth. His body was of immense power and glory, and of dazzling beauty, but he still had the form of a man. The sword coming out of his mouth was no doubt figurative, because Paul said the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Paul spoke of it that way, when he described the full armor of God that we should put on: **“... And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17).

Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe the description of his body was figurative, because remember John also said he was **“resembling a son of man.”** And since the Son is the exact image of God’s essence, then when John described the form of the Son, he was also describing the general form of God the Father.

Those who teach that God does not have a body, and does not look like us, are wrong. God is a spirit, but he also has a body. We too are spirits because we are his offspring. And we too have bodies. Of course, unlike God’s only begotten Son, men are not the exact image of God’s essence. Nevertheless, we are made in his image, as the scripture says: **“And God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”** (Genesis 1:27). I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## John fainted at the sight

- **And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead** (Revelation 1:17).

That no doubt means John fainted at the awesome sight of Jesus. God must have protected John in some way to even allow him to survive the sight of him. For when Moses asked to see God’s glory, God said to him, **“Thou cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. And Jehovah said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shall stand upon the rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand until I have passed by. And I will take away my hand, and thou shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen”** (Exodus 33:20-23).

## The first and the last

- **And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and he who lives. And I became dead, and behold, I am living into the ages of the ages. Truly. And I have the keys of death and of Hades** (Revelation 1:17-18).

Jesus strengthened John when he laid his hand upon him. The prophet Daniel was also strengthened that way by a heaven agent when he was weakened because of visions he experienced. Here is how the record describes it: **“And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. So I was left alone, and saw this great vision. And there remained no strength in me, for my fitness was turned in me into debility, and I retained no strength.**

**“Yet I heard the voice of his words. And when I heard the voice of his words, then I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face toward the ground. And, behold, a hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands”** (Daniel 10:7-10).

Both the Father and the Son said they were the Alpha and the Omega, and the beginning and the end. But only the Son said he was the first and the last. What that probably means is that Jesus was the first son that was begotten from the Father, and he is the last son that will be begotten from the Father. He is the uniquely begotten Son, for there are no others like him, nor will there ever be. He is the first and the last. The *only* begotten Son of God.

Jesus also said he was who lives. He lives because he died on the cross and was resurrected to live into the ages of the ages, forever and ever. And because he endured suffering on the cross in obedience to the Father’s will, he was given the keys of death and Hades. And now he can redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. Our redemption was part of his reward for living a perfect life in the sight of God. I speak much more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

Hades is a general term that means the place of the dead. However, it may also include a temporary place for the torment of sinners, perhaps like the way paradise is in heaven for the joy of God’s sons. That pre-hell was probably where the rich man was in the story of the poor man Lazarus (see Luke 16:19-31). Hades is a transliteration of the Greek word. And the King James Version mistranslates it to say hell.

## Writing about the past, present, and future

- **Therefore write the things that thou saw, and things that are, and things that are going to happen after these things** (Revelation 1:19).

The great vision that John saw included things of the past, the present, and the future. And with those words in that passage Jesus told him to write about all of those things. He was to record the details of his great vision for us to learn about the nature of our world, its past its present and its future. And as the book says earlier, that knowledge would be a great blessing to all who learned it.

## The stars and the lampstands

- **The mystery of the seven stars that thou saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are agents of the seven congregations, and the seven lampstands that thou saw are the seven congregations** (Revelation 1:20).

The seven golden lampstands and the seven stars symbolized the seven congregations and their agents. Gold is the most precious of the metals. And stars and lampstands are both sources of light that are used to dispel darkness. Paul told how we are sons of light, when he said, **“Ye are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness”** (First Thessalonians 5:5).

Regarding the agents of the congregations, I do not believe they were heavenly agents. I believe they were simply men sent to John from each of those congregations while he was in exile on the island of Patmos.

In that symbolism Jesus had those men in his right hand. The Lord was using them to inform those congregations of all that he told John to tell them. That information in those messages was very important to those congregations individually, and it is important to the church at large. It is important to all congregations from the lessons they teach.

## The congregation in Ephesus

- **To the agent of the congregation in Ephesus write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, he who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:** (Revelation 2:1).

Of all those seven congregations the one in Ephesus is the most famous. We know more about it because of the record in the book of Acts, and because the Bible includes a letter Paul wrote to them.

John was commanded to inform them about the stars and the lampstands that he saw. It was important for them to know that Jesus was holding the seven stars in his right hand, and was walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. In other words they belonged to him, and he was walking invisibly among them. And that is true of every congregation of his disciples, not just those particular seven.

## Good things about them

- **I know thy works, and thy toil, and thy perseverance, and that thou cannot tolerate evil, and thou examined those who say themselves to be apostles, and are not, and found them false.**
- **And thou have perseverance. And thou endured because of my name, and did not become weary** (Revelation 2:2-3).

Jesus first mentioned the good things about them, which I have listed below. They

had works, toil, and perseverance  
 could not tolerate evil  
 examined and exposed false apostles  
 had perseverance  
 endured because of his name  
 did not become weary

Those are virtues that all congregations should have. The Lord expects us to persevere in our works for him, bearing fruit for righteousness.

He does not want us to tolerate evil. Permissiveness toward sin is very prevalent in this adulterous generation of Americans. And that evil has infiltrated many congregations, greatly weakening them. Strict discipline is required for strength, whether physical or spiritual.

The Lord praised them for examining and exposing false apostles. Remember how Paul had warned them about such men: **“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 elders of the congregation in Ephesus must have heeded that warning because Jesus said they examined and exposed the false apostles. And every congregation should also examine and expose false teachers. For false teachers are one of the most deadly dangers of our faith. And the way to examine them is with the Bible, the word of God. That is our shining light to expose everything that is false to the will of God.

Notice how Jesus twice mentioned their perseverance. That is another great virtue when it is for truth and righteousness. Who wants anything that is unreliable? All other virtues are of little value when there is no perseverance.

They also endured because of his name. Endurance is related to perseverance. But in this case it was endurance because of his name. That means they were steadfast even when they faced opposition and persecution because of their faith in him. And they did not become weary. That does not mean they never became tired in their flesh. It means they never lost heart and wanted to give up on him. They remained strong in their spirit toward the Lord.

## Things against them

- **Nevertheless, I have against thee because thou left thy first love. Remember therefore from where thou have fallen, and repent and do the first works. And if not, I come to thee quickly, and will move thy lampstand out of its place, if thou do not repent** (Revelation 2:4-5).

Although the congregation in Ephesus had those many virtues, they did have one thing about them that Jesus criticized. They had left their first love. That means their love was not as strong as it was in the beginning. They worked and toiled; they did not tolerate evil; they examined and exposed false apostles; they persevered; they endured because of his name; and they did not become weary. Yet they had left their first love.

Consider what Paul said about not having love: **“If I speak with the tongues of men and of agents, but have not love, I have become sounding brass, or a clashing cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And if I dole out all**

**things possessed by me, and if I deliver my body so that I may be burned, and have not love, I benefit nothing”** (First Corinthians 13:1-3).

Not having love is a fatal flaw of character. Therefore, Jesus warned that congregation

to remember from where they had fallen

to repent

to do the first works

They had fallen from their original lofty love of him and his righteousness. And they needed to look back to what they had been. They needed to repent of their lost love, and do the first works.

They had many virtues, and their first works were done with love, not obligation. That is the kind of works Jesus demands of us: works done with love for him. Too many believers do good works and obey his commands, but they live without the love in their heart that he requires. Therefore, as Paul said, it benefits them nothing.

Jesus also commanded the disciples at Ephesus to act quickly, else he come quickly and remove their lampstand out of its place. In other words, he would cast them out of the kingdom of God unless they repented. They might still assemble as a congregation of believers, but they would not be in the kingdom. For Jesus is the one who decides who belongs to him, not some legalistic set of rules.

## The works of the Nicolaitans

- **But this thou have, that thou hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate** (Revelation 2:6).

It is not known who were the Nicolaitans and what were their works. Nevertheless, Jesus hated their works, and he gave credit to the Ephesian congregation for also hating those works. It is for us to find from the holy scriptures what are the kinds of works that Jesus hates, and also hate them.

## Let him hear

- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations** (Revelation 2:7).

Jesus spoke those same words to each of the seven congregations of Asia. And they are words for us as well. It is for us to develop an ear that can hear what the Spirit says. The world is filled with souls who have no such ear, and so they cannot hear what the Spirit says. They may be able to hear the words, but they cannot understand them. It takes a receptive mind to hear what those words say. And because the world does not want to hear, then they cannot hear. They seem to us to be deaf when we speak to them of the Bible.

Remember what Paul said about the Israelites who do not accept Christ: **“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).

Notice how Jesus referred to himself as the Spirit. For he appeared and spoke to John in his spiritual form. John saw the heavenly body of Jesus, but Jesus said he was a spirit. Many deny that God has a body because he is a spirit. They fail to understand that spirits can have bodies. And most of them do, including God the Father.

### To him who overcomes

- **To him who overcomes, I will give him to eat from the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of my God (Revelation 2:7).**

That is a great promise from Jesus to all who overcome, who overcome the trials and temptations of this sinful world, and remain faithful to him until death.

The tree of life is first mentioned as being in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. It is also mentioned as being in the new Jerusalem where the sanctified of Christ will reside with him and the Father after this world ends (see Revelation 22).

Regarding the paradise of God, remember, Jesus said he would be there after he was crucified (see Luke 23:39-43.) And Paul said he knew a man who was caught up into the paradise (see Second Corinthians 12:2-4). I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

### The congregation in Smyrna

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Smyrna write, These things says the first and the last, who became dead, and lived: (Revelation 2:8).**

Remember, Jesus used those words when he first appeared in his heavenly glory to John: **“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and he who lives. And I became dead, and behold, I am living into the ages of the ages. Truly. And I have the keys of death and of Hades”** (Revelation 1:17-18).

That is something none of us should ever forget. Jesus is the unique Son of God, the only begotten. He both died and lived so he could redeem us from our sins and make us sons of God. We need always remember his great sacrifice for us.

That was why he established the memorial supper of bread and fruit of the vine that we observe. We observe it in memory of him. For he said, **“Do ye this in my memory”** (Luke 22:19), in memory that he is the only begotten Son of God who died and lived so that we too could live.

### Thy works, tribulation, and poverty

- **I know thy works and tribulation and poverty (but thou are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say themselves to be Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9).**

Of the seven congregations that Jesus spoke about, the ones in Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only congregations that Jesus did not criticize about something.

The congregation in Smyrna may have been the poorest of the seven, because Jesus said he knew of their poverty. Nevertheless, he also knew of their works and their tribulation. Being poor in the things of the world is no obstacle to being rich in spirit. Indeed James said, **“Listen, my beloved brothers, did not God choose the poor of the world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him?”** (James 2:5).

Jesus said he knew about the blasphemy of the Jews. Such men are not true sons of Israel. Paul spoke about the difference between those of the flesh and those of the spirit, when he said, **“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).

Those men that were blaspheming were Jews in the flesh but not in their spirit. Hence, Jesus said they were not Jews, but were a synagogue of Satan. Apparently the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna was opposing the disciples of Christ there. Hence, those Jews belonged to Satan and not to God.

How they blasphemed is not told, but perhaps they contributed to the tribulation suffered by the congregation in Smyrna. And those who persecute us persecute the Lord, because we are the body of Christ on the earth. And that is a kind of blasphemy. Also the simple denial that Jesus is the Son of God is blasphemy against God, because it calls him a liar. As John said in another book, **“He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified about his Son”** (First John 5:10)

## Fear not

- **Fear none of the things that thou are going to suffer. Behold, the devil is indeed going to cast some of you into prison, so that ye may be tried, and ye will have tribulation ten days** (Revelation 2:10).

No faithful disciple of Christ should fear the things we suffer. Remember these wonderful words: **“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). Even the things we suffer somehow work for our good.

Although Jesus said that the devil was going to cast some of them into prison, the devil commonly uses his disciples among men to do his evil for him. Hence, it was no doubt disciples among men who were going to cast some of them into prison. It was the spirit of the devil in them that was persecuting those faithful disciples of Christ.

Jesus said they would be cast into prison to be tried. God subjects all of us to different kinds of trials. Remember how he tried the faith of Abraham by commanding him to offer his son Isaac on an altar of sacrifice. That was how God tried and proved that Abraham feared him. After stopping him, the Lord said, **“For now I know that thou fear God, since thou have not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me”** (Genesis 22:12).

Also Peter said, **“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).

Although some at Smyrna were going to suffer imprisonment, it was the kindness of the Lord to tell them that their tribulation would only be for ten days. It is much easier to endure suffering when we know how long it will last. That was another reason why Job suffered so much. He thought his suffering would last for the rest of his life.

### The crown of life

- **Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life** (Revelation 2:10).

The crown of life that Jesus will give is eternal life in heaven with God. And unlike life on earth, that life is one that is free of all sorrow and suffering. As a later passage in Revelation says, **“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 21:3-4).

That life is truly a crown, because it means we will reign with him in heaven after this world ends. That is a reward Jesus will give us for overcoming sin and becoming faithful to him until death.

### He who overcomes

- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations. He who overcomes will, no, not be hurt from the second death** (Revelation 2:11).

Again Jesus warned us to hear what he said to the congregations, because those words are relevant to us all. And again he told how he is a spirit, a spirit with a glorious heavenly body.

The second death is the living death of hell. Hell is called the lake of fire, as the book says, **“And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14-15). I speak much more about hell in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

Notice how Jesus said that our eternal salvation from the condemnation of hell requires that we overcome. And overcoming is not simply having faith in him. The doctrine of salvation by faith only is a false one. We must have both faith and works. And the two together enable us to overcome.

What must we overcome? We must overcome the way Jesus himself overcame. He endured all the evils that the devil and his disciples hurl against those who love God. He refused every temptation to sin. He openly opposed and exposed the enemies of God and his righteousness. He continually did good works both by his teachings and by his actions. Overcoming means to do good works and oppose evil, and do them faithfully until death.

## The congregation in Pergamos

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Pergamos write, These things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword:** (Revelation 2:12).

Remember, when John saw Jesus in his heavenly glory, he said he saw **“a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth”** (Revelation 1:16). A sword is a weapon, and it is used in combat. The sword John saw coming out of the mouth of Jesus no doubt symbolized the word of God. For words come out of our mouths, and they have the power to fight.

Also when Paul told us to **“be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might”** (Ephesians 6:10), he also told us to **“take ye up the full armor of God”** (Ephesians 6:13). And part of our armor is **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...”** (Ephesians 6:17). The word of God is the most powerful weapon we have to combat evil. Jesus uses it and we are expected to use it. For Paul admonished us to **“Fight the good fight of the faith”** (First Timothy 6:12).

And that fight is not against flesh and blood, but is a spiritual fight. That is why Paul said, **“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 6:11-12).

And beware lest you be fearful and shirk from that good fight. For no coward will be given the crown of life, because God said, **“He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me. 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).

Too many believers enjoy the comfort and security of not opposing evil. For when you oppose evil you must fight, and when you fight you are going to suffer opposition. Too many believers fear controversy and strife. Therefore, they become cowards and will not fight. They forget that some fighting is good. Remember, Paul commanded Timothy to **“Fight the good fight of the faith.”** And we too must fight the good fight of the faith if we want to please the Lord.

## Where Satan dwells

- **I know thy works, and where thou dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And thou hold firm my name, and did not deny my faith in the days in which Antipas was my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan dwells** (Revelation 2:13).

Satan's throne was not in Pergamos. His throne was and is in this entire world. When Jesus said the congregation there dwelt where Satan's throne is, he meant they dwelt in this world where Satan rules and dwells.

During the last supper with his apostles, Jesus spoke of Satan as being the ruler of this world: **"Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out"** (John 12:31). Satan was cast out of heaven when Jesus completed his life of perfect obedience to God the Father. And Jesus' final act was to obey God's will that he suffer death by crucifixion.

After Satan was cast out of heaven, a voice there said, **"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 12:12). As long as we are in this world we all dwell where Satan's throne is. The world believes the myth that hell is the devil's domain. It is not. The world is his domain because most men have chosen to serve him. That is why we must fight the good fight (against sin and wickedness) as long as we are in this world.

Jesus spoke of his faithful witness Antipas. Nothing is said about Antipas anywhere else in the Bible. All we know is that he was a faithful witness of Jesus, and he was killed among them. How he was killed is not told. But the text suggests he was killed because of his faithful testimony.

Jesus spoke of how they held firm to his name, and did not deny his faith in the days when Antipas was his faithful witness. That may mean the congregation held firm and did not deny his faith as long as Antipas was witnessing for Christ there.

Remember what Jesus said about leaven: **"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). One faithful witness in a congregation can keep it firm in the Lord, as long as their hearts are right.

## Against them

- **But I have a few things against thee, because thou have there men who adhere to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, even to eat idol sacrifices, and to fornicate. So also thou have men who likewise adhere to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.**
- **Repent therefore, and if not I come to thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my mouth** (Revelation 2:14-16).

Jesus had two things against them. One was that they adhered to the teachings of Balaam, and the other was that they adhered to the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

Balak was the king of Moab when the sons of Israel were preparing to enter their promised land after their exodus from Egyptian bondage, and he sent men to hire a prophet named Balaam to curse them (see Numbers 22-24). The Lord commanded Balaam not to curse them. However, Balaam lusted for the reward that Balak offered to give him. So instead of cursing them he advised Balak how to weaken them. And that was by encouraging the sons of Israel to sin against Jehovah, which would be a snare and weaken them.

The record tells what happened: **“And Israel abode in Shittim. And the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, for they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods. And the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal-peor, and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel”** (Numbers 25:1-3).

There were men in the congregation at Pergamos who were encouraging the disciples there to also worship idols and to fornicate. And sin always separates people from the Lord. The motives of those men is not told. Nevertheless, when the people are separated from the Lord they become easier prey for every kind of evil predator.

They also had men there who adhered to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Remember, Jesus said he hated the works of the Nicolaitans. Although we know not what their teachings were, they produced works that Jesus hates. Hence, the congregation in Pergamos had men who were adhering to evil teachings. And those teachings were threatening its relationship with the Lord. And unless they repented quickly, Jesus was going to war against them with the sword of his mouth. And remember, that sword of his mouth is the word of God.

How Jesus would come and war against them is not told because it is irrelevant for us. God has numerous ways to war against evil, and which of them he uses at different times no doubt depends upon the particular circumstances.

The important thing to remember is that the major way he wars against evil is with the sword of his mouth—the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And we too must serve him by using the Bible as our primary weapon against evil. And we must use it the way a faithful soldier wields his sword against evil enemies, with skill and force.

## He who overcomes

- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations. To him who overcomes, I will give him to eat of the hidden manna. And I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which none knows except he who receives it** (Revelation 2:17).

Again Jesus told all who are able, to hear what he was saying to the congregations. For those words teach important lessons. And wise men always seek to learn good lessons.

This time Jesus said he would give him who overcomes to eat of the hidden manna. Remember, manna was the bread from heaven that God sent daily to the sons of Israel while they were in the wilderness on the way to their promised land.

Here is part of what the record says about it: **“And in the morning the dew lay round about the camp, and when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness a small round thing, small as the hoarfrost on the ground. And when the sons of Israel saw it, they said one to another, What is it? For they knew not what it was. And Moses said to them, It is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat. ...**

**“And the house of Israel called the name of it Manna. And it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers with honey”** (Exodus 16:13-31).

Yet the people scoffed about that food, which Jehovah said to Moses was bread from heaven (see Exodus 16:4). For the record says, **“And the mixed multitude that was among them lusted exceedingly. And the sons of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic, but now our soul is dried away. There is nothing at all except this manna to look upon”** (Numbers 11:4-6).

Those sinners scoffed at the food from heaven that God gave them in the wilderness, but sinners will never be offered the hidden manna of heaven Jesus spoke about. The hidden manna Jesus spoke about is no doubt some kind of special food we will eat in heaven, which means it is hidden to us here upon the earth.

The Bible speaks of our continuing need for food in heaven. For example, Jesus said to his apostles, **“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). However, that heavenly food will only supply us with energy, not with nutrients, because we will all have incorruptible bodies that will never produce any kind of waste, as our bodies of flesh do.

Jesus also said he would give—to those who overcome—a white stone upon which is a new name written and known only to the one who receives it. Those are no doubt figurative words for the new special identity that Jesus will give each of us there in heaven.

And each identity will be uniquely personal. Nobody else will share our identity, just as nobody will ever share the identity of Jesus. And I believe it means we will also be given a new role and purpose there, which will also be unique for each one of us. For complexity always requires specialization. And the new civilization of heaven will be marvelously complex in its glory, which we will enjoy for eternity with him.

## The congregation in Thyatira

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Thyatira write, These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet resembling highly refined metal:** (Revelation 2:18).

That passage clearly says that the glorious heavenly body John saw was the body of the Son of God. And since the Son of God is the exact image of the essence of God the Father, then that describes for us how the body of God himself appears. Why should it be surprising that God has a body with the same kind of form we have? Are we not his offspring? Are we not made in his image? Do not sons have bodies of the same form as their fathers?

Now of course, his body is not of flesh like ours, and it incomprehensibly more wonderful and glorious. Nevertheless, he will give us a glorious body similar to his if we remain faithful until the end. For 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).

## Things for them

- **I know thy works, and thy love and faith and service and perseverance. And thy last works are more than the first** (Revelation 2:19).

The congregation at Thyatira had

works  
love  
faith  
service  
perseverance

Those are wonderful virtues we should all possess. And they include things of the heart as well as things of behavior.

Jesus said their last works were more than the first. That means they had grown spiritually, which is what God wants of us all. As Paul said, **“Because of this we also, from the day that we heard, cease not praying for you and making request that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.**

**“For you to walk worthily of the Lord for every desire to please, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened in every ability, according to the dominion of his glory, for all perseverance and longsuffering with joy”** (Colossians 1:9-10).

Yet for all the good works those disciples at Thyatira had, there was still evil among them. And Jesus described that next.

## Things against them

- **Nevertheless, I have against thee that thou tolerate thy woman Jezebel. She calls herself a prophetess, and teaches and leads astray my bondmen to fornicate, and to eat idol sacrifices** (Revelation 2:20).

It is good to have many virtues, but it is very wrong to tolerate evil. And in their case the evil was great. They tolerated an evil woman who claimed to be a prophetess. That woman was so evil that Jesus called her Jezebel.

Jezebel was the name of a woman described in the Old Testament. And she was perhaps the most evil woman mentioned in the entire Bible. She was the wife of the evil king Ahab, and she was even more evil than he was. You can read about her in First Kings 18-21 and in Second Kings 9.

Jesus accused that false prophetess in the congregation at Thyatira of both teaching them and leading them astray to fornicate and eat idol sacrifices. Remember, Jesus rebuked the congregation in Pergamos for having **“men who adhere to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel, even to eat idol sacrifices, and to fornicate.”**

Eating idol sacrifices meant participating in idol worship. Idol worship was a popular evil of that time, and popular evils are always a temptation to everyone, including believers in Christ. The philosophy called Feminism is a popular evil of this modern generation. And many believers have been corrupted by it.

Fornication appears to be an evil that is tempting for every generation. The Bible everywhere condemns it. Yet the world most often considers it either a harmless practice to tolerate, or, as in this adulterous generation, like Jezebel they consider it good and right, and they encourage it.

### Time for her to repent

- **And I gave her time so that she would repent, and she did not want to repent of her fornication** (Revelation 2:21).

God is patient and longsuffering with sinners, giving them time to repent. For example, the first thing John the immerser proclaimed was repentance: **“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”** (Matthew 3:1-2).

And the first thing Jesus proclaimed when he began to preach was repentance: **“From that time [after his temptations in the wilderness] Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has approached”** (Matthew 4:17).

Yet like that false prophetess most sinners do not want to repent. They love their sin and wickedness. Remember this passage about ancient Israel: **“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).

And here is a passage from Revelation about the refusal of men to repent: **“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).

### Severe punishment

- **Behold, I throw her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, if they do not repent of her works.**
- **And I will kill her children in death. And all the congregations will know that I am he who searches the inner feelings and hearts. And I will give to you—to each—according to your works** (Revelation 2:22-23).

As God eventually does when sinners refuse to repent, he brings his wrath against them. And in this case of Jezebel, Jesus was going to throw her into a bed, and those who committed adultery with her. That adultery could have been literal with her. Or it could also have been figurative referring to their becoming unfaithful to the truth of Christ. The Old

Testament speaks of how the Israelite people committed adultery against God (see, for example, Jeremiah 3:6-10)

That bed Jesus said he would throw them into was a bed of affliction, to bring them great tribulation. But notice how Jesus also added that it would happen **“if they do not repent of her works.”**

Jesus also said he would kill her children in death. God gives everybody life, and he has the right to take it away. Most people condemn God when he takes life away from someone, especially the lives of children. What they fail to understand is that everything God does is right and good and just. Life in this world is a vanity, and it is filled with sorrows and injustices. True life is the eternal life in heaven. God will judge us all about our worthiness to live there, and God will judge the souls of children just as well. And the worthy among them will inherit eternal life just as we will if we are worthy.

Therefore, trust God that he is always good and just. And when he takes the lives of innocent children here in this world of sorrow and tribulation, remember, he will give them an eternal life in a world where there will never be sorrow and tribulation.

For those who have that hope of eternal life, when one of us perishes here, our sorrow is because we will miss them. Our sorrow is not for them, because they are going to a better place. We grieve about their death because they will no longer be with us in this world. In contrast, sinners grieve over death because they have no hope after death. Trust God that he is always good and right and just in whatever happens. And always remember these words of encouragement: **“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).

Jesus also said that when those things happened to that congregation, then all the congregations would know that he is who searches the inner feelings and hearts. God knows everything, even our inner feelings and the thoughts of our hearts. And that way he can guarantee true justice for every man. For, as he said, he will give to each of us according to our works.

We are not going to be judged by our faith, but by our works. Of course, good works are always based upon faith in God and his righteousness. Therefore, our faith is the foundation. Yet a foundation is useless unless something is built upon it. And fruitfulness and good works are to be built upon our faith. For that is how we are going to be rewarded.

## Those remaining there

- **But I say to you, to those remaining in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who do not know, as they say, the deep things of Satan, I do not cast upon you another burden** (Revelation 2:24).

Jesus was speaking here of those who rejected Jezebel and her teachings, nor did they know the so-called deep things of Satan. Often groups involved with errors such as those of Jezebel create an exclusiveness that includes secret knowledge.

And in this case apparently they called it “the deep things of Satan.” What those things were is irrelevant. For groups rise and fall over the ages, and that kind of perverse “knowledge” fades away with them.

Those in Thyatira who remained faithful to the truth of God did not know that teaching, the so-called “deep things of Satan.” They did not know it, either because they would not join with Jezebel, or they refused to hear it because they knew she was a false prophetess.

Regarding the so-called deep things of Satan, the truth is there is no such thing. There is no depth to him. You can see exactly what he is like by looking around you at the world and seeing how sinners live. For it is a world filled with deceit, injustice, and a host of other evils, because he is the spirit at work in them.

For when Paul was speaking of how God exalted Christ, he said, **“And he subordinated all things under his feet, and appointed him head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulfillment of him who fills all in all.**

**“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 1:22-2:2).

Jesus said he would not cast upon those faithful disciples at Thyatira another burden. That probably means it was burden enough to live with the other disciples in that congregation who were following Jezebel and her teachings.

He did not tell them to split away for a new congregation. He did not say he was going to move their lampstand out of its place as he did with the congregation in Ephesus. He said he was going to punish Jezebel, and those who joined her, with severe afflictions. And that would apparently have destroyed her influence, and removed that evil part of their congregation. Remember, Jesus said the congregation at Thyatira had works, love, faith, service, and perseverance. And that is apparently why he would not remove their lampstand, but instead would remove the evil influence of Jezebel among them.

## He who overcomes

- **But hold firm what ye have until I come. 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. And I will give him the morning star.**
- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations** (Revelation 2:25-29).

Holding firm what they had, meant remaining faithful and obedient to him. And when he comes means at the end of the world, because that is the only time Jesus will come again.

And remember, his coming will be in the air, not upon the earth. For when Paul was speaking of it, he said, **“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”** (First Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Again Jesus encouraged us to overcome and keep his works until the end. And this time he said our reward would include having authority over the nations. That does not mean authority over the nations of the earth, because Jesus said he would give that authority at the end, meaning at the end of the world.

The Bible commonly refers to the unbelievers of the world as the nations. For example, **“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate vain things?”** (Psalm 2:1). For there is not one nation in all the world that recognizes Jesus Christ as their Lord and King. The nations will be shattered like ceramic vessels at the end of the world. They will no longer exist as nations. Then all unbelievers will lose their freedoms, and will be ruled with a rod of iron. We as disciples of Christ will be given authority with Christ to rule over them with absolute power.

Jesus also said he would give the morning star to those who overcome and keep his works until the end. A morning star is one that remains visible during the dawn of day. It is therefore, the brightest appearing of the stars, remaining visible after all the others disappear.

The blessing of having the morning star means being the brightest of all other creatures. As God and Christ are like the brightness of the sun, then we, as sons of God, will be like the brightest of the stars.

Speaking of the new Jerusalem in heaven, John said, **“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, so that they might shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the light of it is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it”** (Revelation 21:22-24).

And Jesus, the Spirit, again urged all who have hearts capable of hearing his words to the congregations to hear them, meaning to learn their lessons and apply them.

## The congregation in Sardis

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Sardis write, These things says he who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars:** (Revelation 3:1).

Notice how the passage says that Jesus has the seven spirits of God. Those seven spirits symbolize a special kind of radiant force that God sends out into the world. He uses those seven Spirits to both power all things and be aware of all things. And God has given all of that power to his Son Jesus Christ. Remember, I say much more about those seven spirits in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

That passage in Revelation also says that Jesus has the seven stars. Remember, the book said that those seven stars symbolized the seven agents of the congregations of Asia. Those agents were faithful men whom Jesus was using to inform those congregations of what they needed to hear from him.

They belonged to him, because every faithful soul belongs to him. For Jesus purchased us with his blood, redeeming us from the condemnation of our sins. As 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? 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).

## A good name but spiritually dead

- **I know thy works, that thou have a name that thou live, and thou are dead. Become thou watchful, and strengthen the remaining things that thou were going to throw away, for I have not found thy works made complete before my God** (Revelation 3:1-2).

The congregation in Sardis had a good reputation, but they were spiritually dead. For they were throwing away the things that make us faithful and true to the good news of Christ. Congregations throw away things of truth and righteousness for various reasons.

There is always the lure of the popular things of the world. Also faithfulness to the teachings of Christ subject us to persecutions. They require us to make sacrifices. They discourage many souls causing them to leave. Remember the parable Jesus gave about the seed that was sown. Three of every four failed to grow and be fruitful.

Jesus warned the congregation in Sardis to be watchful, and strengthen the remaining good things about them. So often congregations allow the spirit of the world to slowly lead them astray. They become careless and negligent about the virtues of the good news of Christ. Especially when the world begins to actively oppose those teachings.

Jesus said he had not found their works made complete before his God. Notice how he referred to the Father as his God. That is just more evidence against the false theory of the trinity. Did God the Father ever refer to anyone as his God? God the Father and his Son are one only in the sense that a husband and his wife are one (see Genesis 2:24).

Jesus acknowledged the congregation in Sardis as having works. But they were not made complete before God. That probably means they were fragmented, inadequate, and ineffective. Works that are incomplete are not only useless, but an object of derision.

Remember what Jesus said about not finishing a work: **“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”** (Luke 14:28-30).

## Be on guard and repent

- **Remember therefore how thou have received and heard, and be on guard, and repent. If therefore thou will not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou will, no, not know what hour I will come upon thee** (Revelation 3:3).

The congregation in Sardis had received and heard enough already to become disciples of Christ. And now they were receiving specific instructions about them directly from the Lord. Hence, they had no excuse about not knowing. Consequently, Jesus admonished them to remember those things.

And he warned them to be on guard and repent. While Jesus walked upon the earth he often warned about being on guard. For example, remember these words in Mark's biography of him: **"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).

And we must all heed that warning, which means we should all be prepared for his coming. And if we have things that are against us, then we too must repent so that we will be ready. Being ready means remaining faithful to him by continuing to obey his commandments.

Both Peter and Paul warned that the day of the Lord would come as a thief, which means it will be completely unexpected. We should all expect it to come, but the exact time will be unexpected.

## A few names

- **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** (Revelation 3:4).

Jesus did not name any specific sins of the congregation in Sardis. He simply told them they had a name that they lived, but were dead. He also said that they were going to throw away things they ought not, and their works were incomplete before his God.

Their garments were defiled by those things. As fruit is sometimes used to symbolize our works, so also our garments are sometimes used to symbolize our flesh. Remember, Jesus said sin is what defiles us. And most of the disciples in Sardis had defiled themselves.

There were only a few names there who had not defiled themselves. And Jesus promised they would walk with him in white. White symbolizes purity and holiness. Hence, those few disciples were worthy of walking with him. And if we want to walk with him in heaven we too must make ourselves worthy by not defiling ourselves with sin, unrepentant sin. For only we can make ourselves worthy of receiving the grace of God.

## He who overcomes

- **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 3:5-6).

Being clothed with white garments means our spirits will be given a new imperishable body, one like that of our Lord, as well as being arrayed in white apparel. Paul spoke of our new bodies, when he said, **"Now this I affirm, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishability.**

**“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed. For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality”** (First Corinthians 15:50-53).

Jesus also promised the faithful that he would not erase our names out of the book of life. In the last part of this book of Revelation John described the great judgment day. And he told how the book of life would be used then: **“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.**

**“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. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:11-15).

Jesus also said he would acknowledge the names of the faithful before his Father and before his agents. Remember how Jesus warned about not being acknowledged by him in heaven. For he said, **“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).

And again Jesus urged those of us who have open hearts that will listen, to hear what he was saying. For those words are filled with important lessons for us all.

## The congregation in Philadelphia

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Philadelphia write, These things says the Holy, the True, he who has the key of David, who opens, and none will shut it except he who opens, and none will open:** (Revelation 3:7).

There is a passage in the book of Isaiah that speaks of those things. In that passage Jehovah was speaking, and he said, **“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy belt.**

**“And I will commit thy government into his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder, and he shall open, and none shall shut, and he shall shut, and none shall open”** (Isaiah 22:20-22).

The words in that Old Testament passage about having the key of David and opening and shutting appear to symbolize complete authority. And with them Jesus was telling the congregation in Philadelphia that God has given him complete and absolute authority.

The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, has always been holy and true. He lived a perfect life of holiness and truth even in this evil world filled with temptations. He alone is perfect (he and the Father). Hence, he deserves to have absolute authority, which is symbolized by the words about the key of David and opening and shutting.

## Knowing their works

- **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** (Revelation 3:8).

Remember, only two of the seven congregations in Asia were not rebuked by the Lord Jesus. The congregation in Philadelphia was one of them. He only had words of encouragement for them. And the first of those words were about having power.

Although they had little power, Jesus has complete power. And he was giving them an opened door that none would be able to shut it. An opened door symbolizes access to things that are restricted. And Jesus was guaranteeing them access, meaning the right to enter. And he was no doubt referring to access to the kingdom of God in heaven.

He was giving them that right to enter because they kept his word and did not deny his name. Keeping his word means being faithful to the truth of his good news of salvation, and obeying his commands about it.

## The synagogue of Satan

- **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).

Remember what Jesus said to the congregation in Smyrna about a synagogue of Satan. He said to that congregation he not only knew their works and tribulation and poverty, but he also knew **“the blasphemy of those who say themselves to be Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”** (Revelation 2:9).

These are the only two places in the Bible that speak of a synagogue of Satan. Notice how Jesus said both times that those men who claimed to be Jews were not, but he did not explain what he meant.

I already mentioned (in my comments about the congregation in Smyrna) how Paul said that a Jew was not a matter of the flesh but of the heart, in a man's spirit (see Romans 2:28). However, it is also possible those men were proselytes of the Jews. Often proselytes are the most fanatical about their faith.

Nevertheless, whether they were Jews by birth or were proselytes, the Bible record shows that Jews were the most bitter enemies of Christ and his church. The book of Acts mentions many times when Jews would rise up in opposition to Paul, often using violence

against him. They even opposed him when he was working with the Gentiles. Indeed, some of them even followed Paul as he traveled to different Gentile cities to arouse the citizens against him.

The Lord Jesus said to the congregation in Philadelphia that he was going to make those Jews come and bow down before their feet. That will no doubt happen at the end of the world and the final judgment. For the text says they would then know that Jesus had loved them. And we should be encouraged to know that all of our enemies are going to bow down before our feet and know that Jesus has loved us—if we remain faithful to his truth and righteousness.

## Keeping the word of his perseverance

- **Because thou keep the word of my perseverance, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole inhabited world, to try those who dwell upon the earth** (Revelation 3:10).

We are not told what was that world-wide hour of trial. Hence, there are many conjectures about it. Remember, the word “hour” is often used figuratively to refer simply to a period of time, usually a relatively short one.

Jesus told them that hour of trial was to try those who dwelt upon the earth. It may have been some kind of natural disaster, like a pandemic, that produced a time of social disorder. During such times righteous souls become helpful, while unrighteous ones become lawless and predatory.

Jesus said he was going to keep the congregation in Philadelphia from that hour of trial. Since they were righteous souls and united together, they would not have been vulnerable to the kind of chaotic lawlessness and predation caused by social disorders.

## Hold firm

- **I come quickly, hold firm what thou have, so that none may take thy crown** (Revelation 3:11).

When Jesus said he comes quickly he obviously did not mean he was coming back to the earth soon, because it has been two thousand years since he spoke those words. He meant that when he comes it will be quickly. He will appear suddenly without warning. That is why he often urged us to always be prepared and watch.

The congregation in Philadelphia was a faithful one. They lived faithfully and righteously. They had the quality of spirit needed to be worthy of the glories of eternal life. Having a worthy spirit is the most valuable thing we can have, because that is the one thing we take with us to the afterlife. For when Solomon was speaking of death, he said, “... **the spirit returns to God who gave it**” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Having a worthy spirit is what enables us to be given a crown in heaven.

A crown is a symbol of royalty. And remember, we will reign with Jesus as sons of God for eternity there in heaven. The Bible also mentions a crown of life. Jesus promised that to the congregation in Smyrna, which was the other congregation that he did not rebuke

about anything. He said to them, **“Become thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10).

James also spoke of the crown of life, when he said, **“Blessed is a man who endures temptation, because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him”** (James 1:12).

Notice how obtaining our crown is contingent upon how we live. We must hold firm to our faith and righteousness, and endure temptations without sinning, so that we can become approved.

What is meant by taking our crown is not clear. An agent from heaven said to Daniel the prophet, **“But go thou thy way till the end is. For thou shall rest, and shall stand in thy lot at the end of the days”** (Daniel 12:13). Each one of us will probably have a special lot in heaven, which may be part of our crown. Nevertheless remember, our lot and crown will be given to another if we prove unworthy.

## He who overcomes

- **He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will, no, not go out any more. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem (it comes down out of the heaven from my God), and my new name.**
- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations** (Revelation 3:12-13).

Again Jesus spoke of a blessing for him who overcomes, and that applies to each of us. It is our duty to overcome the trials and temptations of this life, and make ourselves worthy of the blessings he is offering us.

Being a pillar in the temple of God is another great blessing. The entire city of the new Jerusalem will be the temple of heaven. For when John was describing his vision of that great city, he said, **“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb”** (Revelation 21:22).

Being a pillar means we will serve an important function and purpose there. For that great city will be a dynamic place full of continuous creative activity. I make many conjectures about that in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The new Jerusalem will not be the only place in heaven. It will be the capital city of a great civilization there. For John also said about it, **“And the nations [in heaven] will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth [the new earth] bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it. And the gates of it will, no, not be locked by day, for there will be no night there. And they will bring the splendor and the worth of the nations into it”** (Revelation 21:24-26).

When Jesus said we would not go out any more, he meant it would always be our dwelling place. For I have no doubt we will go in and out of its gates as we rule over the nations there.

Jesus will write upon us the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, which is the new Jerusalem, and his own name. Those things mean that our identity there will be as

part of God, Christ, and that capital city. We will be sons of God, brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ, and royal citizens of that supreme capital.

Paul spoke of our place there, when he 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. So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord this way beloved”** (Philippians 3:20-4:1).

At the end of the world and the final judgment, God will bring forth that great city. For in his great vision John told how an agent from heaven showed it to him (after the end of the world): **“And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ...”** (Revelation 21:10). John then described the glories of it. As Jesus said to the congregation in Philadelphia, God will bring that great city down out of heaven for us. He will bring it to the new earth there.

And again Jesus said, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations.”** Open your heart so that you can hear all the wonderful things that Jesus says. Because the glories we will enjoy for eternity in heaven are real, more real than our short and vain lives here in this world. Therefore, set your eyes upon things above.

Paul also said to seek the things above: **“If therefore ye were raised with the Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Think on the things above, not the things on the earth. For ye died, and your life has been hidden with the Christ in God. When the Christ, our life, is made known, then ye also will be made known with him in glory”** (Colossians 3:1-4).

Let not foolish men lead you astray by claiming that we are mere animals with no meaning or purpose. Set your eyes on the things above where our Creator God waits for us to overcome and be worthy to become his sons for eternity in that supreme city that lasts forever.

Notice how the heavenly Jesus spoke four times of the Father as his God in that brief passage. That is just more evidence to disprove the false trinity theory.

## The congregation in Laodicea

- **And to the agent of the congregation in Laodicea write, These things says the Truly, the faithful and true witness, the primacy of the creation of God:** (Revelation 3:14).

Jesus is the Truly. He is the very personification of truth. And he is the faithful and true witness. Jesus came into this dark and sinful world to teach us what God is like and how he wants us to live. He was the best witness God could have sent to us.

If you want to know what God is like, then study the life and teachings of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. For he said about himself, **“He who has seen me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9). And he did not mean his body, but his spirit, which is the most important part of anyone.

Jesus is also the primacy of the creation of God. Before the beginning of anything God desired to have sons. Therefore, he begot Jesus Christ. After which they worked together to create the spiritual world of heaven and our material world of earth.

Moreover, Jesus with his sinless life upon the earth, he won the right to be given all things. God made him supreme over all, except of course for God himself. Hence, Jesus is the primacy of the creation of God. I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Neither cold nor hot

- **I know thy works, that thou are neither cold nor hot. O that thou were cold or hot. So because thou are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to spew thee out of my mouth** (Revelation 3:15-16).

There are times when cold is good and helpful. There are times when hot is good and helpful. Indeed, during their appropriate times both cold and hot are very valuable. Lukewarmness is associated with things that are static and unproductive.

That is true of a great many things, including the things we eat and drink. Food and drink that are lukewarm are less pleasing to the body. They neither warm us when we are cold, nor cool us when we are hot.

The congregation in Laodicea was lukewarm. They were apparently living bland, static, and unproductive lives. They were neither cold nor hot. They were not helpful for any kind of need. Therefore, Jesus was going to eject them from his kingdom.

## Not rich but poor

- **Because thou say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and do not know that thou are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked** (Revelation 3:17).

The congregation in Laodicea was the only one of the seven that Jesus had nothing good to say about them. They boasted of

being rich  
having become wealthy  
having need of nothing.

They were obviously looking only at the outward material things of their lives. For Jesus said they were actually

wretched  
miserable  
poor  
blind  
naked

And they did not even know it. They were looking at the worldly part of their lives, but Jesus was looking at the condition of their spirit. And that is the most important part of anyone. For our spirit is our eternal existence. And they had made their spirit wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

The world is filled with people who are exactly like that. But such people do not belong in the kingdom of God. And when a congregation becomes corrupted that way, they too do not belong.

Therefore, every congregation should be vigilant about the character of their spirit. They should never allow success in this world to blind them about their eternal existence. Worldly wealth and success always threaten to blind us about the condition of our souls.

### Buy gold refined from fire

- **I counsel thee to buy from me gold refined from fire, so that thou may become wealthy, and white garments, so that thou may clothe thyself, and the shame of thy nakedness may not be made known, and eye-salve, so that thou may anoint thine eyes, so that thou may see** (Revelation 3:18).

In that passage Jesus was speaking of spiritual things, not material things. Remember what he said about the mouth: **“Not that which enters into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles the man”** (Matthew 15:11). That too was about spiritual things.

The gold refined from fire probably refers to the word of God, the Holy Bible. The New Testament had not yet been compiled, but the word of God was still available for them in the Old Testament scriptures and in the memories of those who were taught by Jesus and the apostles.

There is nothing more precious in all the world than the word of God, because it contains the greatest wisdom of all. And Solomon said about wisdom, **“Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. For the gain of it is better than the gain of silver, and the profit of it than fine gold”** (Proverbs 3:13-14).

The white garments they needed were to cover the shame of their nakedness, which were also figurative words. Nakedness makes people weak and vulnerable. And foolish and sinful behavior is like spiritual nakedness, revealing weakness and vulnerability. Righteousness is like white garments, providing both protection and beauty.

The congregation in Laodicea also needed eye-salve to anoint their eyes. That symbolized their spiritual blindness. They were apparently like drunkards, because drunkenness dulls the mind and clouds the eyes. A drunkard may be naked, and not even know it or even care about it. It makes them think and act like infants.

The eye-salve they needed also symbolizes wisdom from the word of God. For there is nothing that opens our eyes like his wisdom. And there is no greater blindness than not having that knowledge and understanding. Having his wisdom is like having a lamp in the darkness. Without it we grope our way in life, stumbling over many obstacles.

### Those I love I rebuke and chasten

- **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent** (Revelation 3:19).

That is a great truth that even Solomon wrote about when he said, **“My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah, nor be weary of his reproof. For whom Jehovah loves he reproves, and he whips every son whom he receives”** (Proverbs 3:11-12).

The author of the book of Hebrews said even more about how the Lord chastens those whom he loves: **“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? And if ye are without chastening, of which all have become participants, then ye are bastards, and not sons.**

**“Besides, we indeed have had chastisers—the fathers of our flesh—and we were turned around. Shall we not much more be subordinate to the Father of the spirits, and we will live? For those men indeed for a few days chastened us according to that which seemed good to them, but he for that which is advantageous, in order to be partakers of his holiness.**

**“But of course no chastening for the present seems to be of joy but of sorrow, yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

**“Therefore lift up the drooping hands, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be turned away, but may be healed instead”** (Hebrews 12:5-13).

One of the foolish things of this adulterous generation is their hostility to chastening, especially the chastening of children. Indeed, they have passed laws making it more difficult for parents and teachers to chasten children. They have lost sight of the great value of proper chastening.

Loving parents and teachers chasten their children because they love them. And even though Jesus rebuked and chastened the congregation in Laodicea he still said that he loved them. And he urged them to repent. For without repentance God will withdraw his love from us. Indeed, the congregation in Laodicea needed to be zealous about repenting.

Having zeal reveals strong motivation. And we all need to be strongly motivated to put away our sins and embrace God’s truth and righteousness. A lack of zeal and weak motivation is the kind of lukewarmness that God rejects. Remember however, zeal and strong motivation must be carefully directed with truth and wisdom.

## Opening the door for Christ

- **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me** (Revelation 3:20).

Those words are for every individual soul. They symbolize Jesus’ desire for us to accept him. They symbolize his efforts for us to be reconciled with him. He wants to dine with us. That means he wants us to enjoy good things with him.

Remember some of the words he said about his apostles in his prayer during their last meeting before his betrayal: **“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.**

**“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 17:22-24).

However, Jesus cannot make us accept him. It is our choice alone. For we are offspring of God having the power of free will. Therefore, all he can do is offer us the opportunity to be united with him.

And remember, that opportunity does not last forever, because when this life is over it will never again be extended to us. Indeed, even in this life God withdraws his offer if a man becomes too wicked and sinful. God will harden the heart of such a man so that he will not repent. Remember the scripture that Jesus’ quoted from Isaiah: **“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”** (John 12:40).

## He who overcomes

- **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.**
- **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the congregations** (Revelation 3:20-22).

Again Jesus promised a great reward for those who overcome. Jesus overcame the trials and temptations of this life, living faithfully to God’s truth and righteousness. Consequently, God rewarded him by setting him in God’s throne. And Jesus has promised that he will give us the reward of sitting with him in his throne.

Remember, God’s throne is much more than a mere seat. It is a great command center, where he and his Son Jesus Christ oversee all things, both in heaven and on the earth. And if we also overcome in our struggled life here in this world, then we too will reign with Christ in that great command center. (I speak much more about heaven and the throne of God in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.)

And as Jesus said to each of the seven congregations of Asia, he urged us all to hear what he says to them; that is, if we are able to hear. Remember, many souls have stopped their ears and hardened their hearts against the word of God. Just try to speak to them about it and you will soon see how many are not able to hear.

They will not hear, either because their lack of faith makes them too complacent and indifferent, or they love this sinful world too much. Be not like them, but set your eyes on things above, and hear what the Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord, says whenever he speaks. For he speaks truth and righteousness, and those things will elevate your spirit and make you qualified to become a son of God for eternity.

## John's great vision of heaven

The remaining part of the book of Revelation is a record the apostle John wrote about a great vision he had of things in heaven. It was the greatest such vision ever seen by a man. As the first part of the book of Revelation says, John first saw Jesus appear to him in his heavenly glory, and Jesus gave him messages to write for each of the agents of the seven congregations of Asia. That was followed by John's great vision of heaven.

Many of the things John saw in that vision seem to have been like theatrical productions that portrayed figurative things and events, all staged for John's benefit so that he could record them in this book for us. His vision is about things such as

- the nature of our earthly life
- how God is interacting with the world
- Satan's kingdom and his war with God
- what we should expect as children of God in this sinful world
- the end of the world, the final judgment, and the new world in heaven

However, since John's book is filled with descriptions of things and events that are highly symbolic, that makes what he wrote very difficult to interpret. It is without doubt the most difficult book to understand in the entire Bible. And my desire to be accurate about what I write almost caused me to give up attempting to analyze the book. Especially after I noticed this passage about one of the prophet Daniel's visions: **"And I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end"** (Daniel 12:8-9). I said to myself, "Could the words of Revelation be shut up and sealed till the time of the end?"

However, I then noticed this passage from Revelation: **"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! And he says to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near"** (Revelation 22:8-10).

The agent in heaven commanded John not to seal the words of the prophecy of that book. Therefore, I continued to study its words. For there are many valuable lessons and insights that can be gained from that great book. Indeed, the book itself says, **"Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and who keep the things written in it, for the time is near"** (Revelation 1:3).

What was the book and the words of prophecy that were mentioned in those passage? They refer to the entire record of John's vision. For remember what John was told at the beginning of it: **"I became in spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a great voice like a trumpet saying, What thou see, write in a book and send to the seven congregations: ..."** (Revelation 1:10-11).

What do the words **"for the time is near"** in those passages above mean? They cannot mean all of the events described in the vision are near, because it also describes the end of the world and the new heaven and earth. Those words may simply be telling John that the

time was near when the New Testament would be completed. And that book was to be the last one in it.

Comments in Revelation involving time, such as time being near or coming quickly, cannot be interpreted as we commonly do. Consider what Jesus said near the end of the book: **“Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me to render to each man as his work will be”** (Revelation 22:12). He said that almost two thousand years ago, yet he has still not come. I explain what he meant when I get to that passage.

There is another important characteristic of Revelation that you need to recognize to prevent you from becoming confused about the sequence of events described in it. Switching between descriptions of things about the past, about the present, and about the future is done very frequently in Revelation and without explanation or warning. That kind of time switching is done occasionally in other parts of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, but it is very common in Revelation. Therefore, be prepared to notice when descriptions of things involving the past, present, or future are switched from one to the other. In this commentary I try to help you with that as well as with many other things.

Revelation is a marvelous overview of what our world is like, how to understand what is happening now, and what we can expect in the future. It also offers many encouraging words for the righteous to endure their suffering here, promising them ultimate victory and eternal reward in heaven. It also contains many warnings about sinning against God. It is a very appropriate book to end the Holy Bible.

## A door opened in heaven for John

- **After these things I looked, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard like a trumpet, speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show thee what must happen after these things. And straightaway I became in spirit** (Revelation 4:1-2).

This is the beginning of John’s great vision of heaven. That door John saw was probably like a portal in space that allowed John access to the greater world of heaven. Heaven is a vastly larger realm than our universe. Our universe is but a small region in the center of the heavenly realm. The Bible says our world is God’s footstool, while the heavenly realm is his throne (see Isaiah 66:1).

Therefore, the opened door in heaven was simply a portal enabling access to the greater realm of heaven. And the voice like a trumpet gave John the power to enter that divine portal. And in order for John to enter that spiritual world, he needed to become in spirit, meaning outside of his body of flesh.

Regarding being in spirit, remember, John said he became in spirit just before he saw and heard Jesus in his glory. And now just before he entered the spiritual world of heaven, he again said he became in spirit. What probably happened was that after he received the messages from Jesus about the seven congregations of Asia, he returned to his normal body of flesh. Hence, there must have been the passage of time between those events. That time was probably needed for him to convey those messages to the seven agents of those congregations.

The voice that John heard was like a trumpet, which means it was a powerful, but non-threatening voice. That voice commanded him to come up there to see things he would show him that would happen after those things. That means after John entered the portal he would be shown things by the speaker of that great voice, things that “must happen.”

There are many things that do not need to happen, because we have the power of free will and can choose to do things or not do them. However, the speaker of that voice said that what John would be shown were things that must happen. What that means is also unclear. It probably means that it was necessary for John to witness those special theatrical productions about great events (past and future) of our world and of heaven, which are described in the remaining part of this book. And then John would need to record them for our benefit, as he did in this book.

The speaker of that voice was probably Jesus Christ, but it was a heavenly agent who showed John those things in heaven. For near the end of the book, a passage says, **“I, Jesus, have sent my agent to testify these things to you for the congregations. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star”** (Revelation 22:16).

## The Throne of God

- **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** (Revelation 4:2-3).

Him sitting upon the throne was God the Father. And his appearance being similar to a jasper and a sardius stone symbolizes his great beauty. That is the only direct description of God the Father that we have in the Bible, and it only indicates he has great beauty. Otherwise, we must infer his appearance from the description we have of the heavenly body of Jesus who is **“the radiance of his glory, and the exact image of his essence ...”** (Hebrews 1:3).

Remember, John gave that description of him near the beginning of this book: **“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 1:13-16).

The rainbow around the throne was also figurative. And its being like an emerald in appearance also symbolizes great beauty. Rainbows display all of the pure colors of light. And light symbolizes truth, wisdom, and knowledge. Therefore, all the kinds of truth, wisdom, and knowledge in their great beauty are displayed symbolically like a rainbow around the throne of God.

Since righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne (see Psalm 97:2), that may be why his throne is encompassed by truth, wisdom, and knowledge. Remember what Paul said about all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: **“... 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).

### The twenty-four elders

- **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** (Revelation 4:4).

A later passage in the book says those twenty-four elders were men (generically speaking) who had been redeemed from the world by the Son of God (the Lamb): **“And when he took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each elder having a harp and golden bowls containing incense, which are the prayers of the sanctified.**

**“And they sing a new song, saying, Thou are worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou were killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth”** (Revelation 5:8-10).

Since twelve symbolizes completeness, then those twenty-four elders probably symbolize all the redeemed from both before Jesus and after him. Remember the last words Jesus said before John was commanded to come up to heaven: **“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). Twenty-four does not seem like much, but remember that number is no doubt figurative for completeness. The actual number will be vastly greater, so much greater that it cannot be numbered (see Revelation 7:9).

The golden crowns upon their heads symbolize their authority to **“reign over the earth.”** That means to reign with Christ over the new heaven and earth. The book of Revelation tells much more about those things farther on.

### The lightnings and voices and thunders

- **And out of the throne proceeds lightnings and voices and thunders** (Revelation 4:5).

As the description of God and his throne indicate great beauty, so the lightnings and thunders symbolize great power. For there is no greater power displayed upon the earth than lightnings and thunder. A voice is an utterance. And the voices proceeding out of the throne symbolize information and commands given, accompanied with great power.

### The seven Spirits of God

- **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** (Revelation 4:5).

Those seven lamps of fire burning before his throne, which are the seven Spirits of God, symbolize the great energy source God made to create not only our world but also the

heavenly world. And he uses them to keep both of those worlds functioning. Those seven Spirits are also the means by which he has the power of complete control and awareness.

Those Spirits are like the electrical energy that we use to energize things and to transmit information. Their burning symbolizes the spiritual radiant energy that is involved in those things. For a later passage speaks about **“the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth”** (Revelation 5:6). God’s energy is sent forth into all the earth (1) to energize all things, (2) to have control of all things, and (3) to have awareness of all thing, while he himself remains in his throne, his command center.

Notice in the next passage, which describes those around the throne honoring God, that the seven Spirits were not included. That is further evidence those seven Spirits are not persons. There is too much to say about those seven Spirits to include here. I have an entire chapter about them in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The glassy sea similar to crystal seems to symbolize the fundamental elements of the heavenly world. And as soil covers the surface of our world, so also something like pure crystal covers the heavenly world. There is nothing dirty in or about the heavenly world.

## The four living creatures

- **And in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne, were four living creatures containing eyes in front and back. And the first living creature was similar to a lion, and the second living creature was similar to a young bull, and the third living creature having a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was similar to a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, one by one, each having six wings, are full of eyes around and inside (Revelation 4:6-8).**

That passage is similar to one in Isaiah, which may also be about those living creatures: **“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). Seraphim may be another kind of cherubim.

Regarding cherubim, Jehovah commanded Moses to make images of cherubim to place on top of the ark of the covenant. Here is what he said about them: **“And thou shall make a mercy-seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half the length of it, and a cubit and a half the breadth of it [remember a cubit is thought to be about eighteen inches]. And thou shall make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work shall thou make them, at the two ends of the mercy-seat.**

**“And make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the mercy-seat ye shall make the cherubim on the two ends of it. And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high, covering the mercy-seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy-seat.**

**“And thou shall put the mercy-seat above upon the ark. And in the ark thou shall put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee. And I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment to the sons of Israel”** (Exodus 25:17-22).

And here is a description of the cherubim in the temple that Solomon built: **“And in the oracle he made two cherubim of olive-wood, each ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub. From the outermost part of the one wing to the outermost part of the other were ten cubits. And the other cherub was ten cubits; both of the cherubim were of one measure and one form. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so it was of the other cherub.**

**“And he set the cherubim inside the inner house [the most holy place]. And the wings of the cherubim were stretched forth, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall. And their wings touched each another in the middle of the house. And he overlaid the cherubim with gold”** (First Kings 6:23-28).

Hence, I believe those four living creatures are probably cherubim that serve as guards for his command center. For the Bible says they are **“in the midst of the throne, and all around the throne.”** And they are creatures of great power and ability.

The description of them is no doubt figurative, because they are described as having features similar to a lion, a young bull, a man, and a flying eagle. Lions and young bulls symbolize strength and power; men symbolize intelligence; and flying eagles symbolize the ability to travel swiftly. Hence, they are creatures

- that can attack and defeat other creatures
- that have great strength and endurance
- that have great intelligence, and
- that can move about swiftly

In other words, they have the best abilities of all other creatures. Moreover, they **“are full of eyes around and inside,”** which means they have great sensory powers. And having all of those abilities makes them perfect guards to protect his command center from any kind of threat.

Nevertheless, the seven Spirits of God have seven eyes and seven horns, which means they have the power of complete awareness and control. The living creatures have great sensory ability, but not the power of complete awareness as do the seven Spirits of God.

God may need guards for his command center because he has taken the form of a man. His temporary form as a man (temporary until this world is over) is his **“weak thing.”** Paul spoke of the weak thing of God when he was contrasting the wisdom and power of God with the wisdom and power of men **“... the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men”** (First Corinthians 1:25).

I believe God took on the form of a man for at least two reasons. First, it was for our benefit so that we would more easily identify with him as his heavenly Father. The second reason was to test the souls of those in heaven. Sinners of the world think God is weak.

Hence, they have no fear of him. And apparently some souls in heaven also think God is weak, because he has enemies there. Indeed, the great adversary of God called Satan was in heaven until Jesus returned to heaven victoriously. It was then that Satan and his agents were cast out, although it took a war to do it (see Revelation 12:7).

Hence, the reason for the living creatures being there was to surround his throne as powerful guards. God could easily defeat any kind of threat to him and his throne by transforming himself into his original form. However, he will not do that until the end of the world (see Revelation 21:6). I speak much more about those things in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

## Honoring God in heaven

- **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 are 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 4:8-11).

John told how the four living creatures and the elders worshiped and praised the Lord, the Almighty God. Those who are closest to God in heaven are motivated to praise and worship him continually. However, that does not mean they did nothing else, because those are figurative words just like these commands Paul gave to the brothers in Thessalonica: **“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing”** (First Thessalonians 5:16-17).

The longer I live and the closer I become to my beloved heavenly Father the more I want to praise him. My mind frequently urges me to praise him because he is so wonderful in every way. He is so good and right and just; he is so merciful and gracious and loving; he is so perfect in every way. I cannot stop praising him because I have learned so much about him. Even when I am concentrating intensely upon something else, those thoughts in my mind of worship and praise to him are always in the background of my thinking.

Revelation speaks of a temple in heaven. Perhaps those elders and living creatures were all worshipping and praising God inside that temple where God was, because the temple in Jerusalem was called the house of God. Here is a passage that tells how David made preparation to build the first temple in Jerusalem: **“And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be built for Jehovah must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and of glory throughout all countries. I will therefore make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death. Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build a house for Jehovah, the God of Israel”** (First Chronicles 22:5-6).

We are now the temple of God in the world, for Paul said, **“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy this man, for the temple of God is holy, which ye are”** (First

Corinthians 3:16-17). We are his temple in the world because his Spirit dwells in us here upon the earth.

## An overview of the world

That concludes the first thing John saw after he was taken into heaven; namely the throne of God and those around it. What he saw immediately after those things seems to have been a symbolic portrayal presenting an overview of the nature of our lives in the world. That overview contains figurative descriptions of

- the four natural forces of life in the world
- how righteous souls are persecuted by sinners in the world but are rewarded in heaven
- God's wrath against the sinners of the world

That overview portrayed to John things of the past, of the present, and of the future. And it does not explain when it switches from one time period to another.

John's description of that overview also includes encouraging words about God's protection of the righteous from his wrath, and their guaranteed salvation in heaven. That overview began when the Lamb (Jesus Christ) in the midst of the throne opened the seven seals of a book that God gave to him. The next passage tells why God gave him the book.

## The worthiness of the Lamb

- **And I saw at the right hand of him who sits on the throne a book, written inside and outside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a powerful agent proclaiming in a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals of it? And none in heaven above nor on the earth nor under the earth was able to open the book or to see in it. And I wept much because none was found worthy to open the book or to see in it.**
- **And one of the elders says to me, Weep not, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, overcame to open the book and the seven seals of it.**
- **And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, like it had been killed, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took it out of the right hand of him who sits on the throne (Revelation 5:1-7).**

I believe that book in God's right hand symbolized his plan for developing sons for eternity. And that plan required the creation of our world. For it would be in our world where his offspring would be offered the opportunity for eternal sonship. Nobody was found worthy to open the book in God's hand, and John wept much because of it. He wept because he understood what that meant.

I believe what it meant was that nobody was found worthy of fulfilling those plans. And without fulfilling them there could be no sons of God for eternity (except for the Son of God himself). However, we can all thank God and rejoice that the Lamb (the Son of God) was found worthy. He alone was able to make the world fit for existence. For without his

redeeming power, the world would be a place of complete vanity. Remember these words of Solomon: **“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).

Without our hope of salvation for a life in heaven, our lives would be completely vain and senseless. For what profit would there be in it? This world is a place of tribulation where every life always ends in death. All that we could do is try to have some pleasure and enjoyment in the midst of all our toils and sorrows until we perished. After which we would suffer the wrath of God because of our sins.

In the world Jesus was first called the Lamb of God by John the immerser: **“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). I explain more about why Jesus was called the Lamb of God in my commentary of that passage.

The Lamb standing like it had been killed symbolizes the necessity of the innocent man Jesus Christ being rejected and killed when he was in the world. The Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirit of God being sent forth into all the earth, they symbolize his authority and control over those seven Spirits of God that are before the throne of God.

And remember, besides energizing everything, they have all power over all things in the world (symbolized by the seven horns), and they have all knowledge of all things in the world (symbolized by the seven eyes). Also remember what Jesus said about God's complete control and knowledge: **“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”** (Matthew 10:29-30).

Only the Lamb of God was found worthy to open the book in the right hand of God because only he is able to save our souls. Therefore, God gave him the book to open the seals of it. Jesus was able to carry out God's plan for our salvation and adoption because of his ability to live a sinless and sacrificial life as a man in the world in perfect obedience to God the Father. When he lived that life successfully it earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. 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).

### Those around the throne worship the Lamb

- **And when he took the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.**
- **Each elder having a harp and golden bowls containing incense, which are the prayers of the sanctified. And they sing a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou wast killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth** (Revelation 5:8-10).

It was the elders who sang the new song telling how the Lamb, Jesus Christ, purchased them from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, thereby showing how those elders were men who had lived in the world and were redeemed by Christ.

In obedience to the Father's will, the Lamb, Jesus Christ the Son of God, allowed himself to be killed. And that earned him the right to purchase us from God by paying the debt of our sins to him. For Jesus can now redeem from the condemnation of sins all who belong to him. His perfect obedience to the Father, even to the point of suffering a cruel death on the cross, earned him that right.

And being made righteous before God through that redemption, we are now kings and priests to our God. For as 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). And our reign over the earth is the new heaven and earth after this one is over.

### All creatures worship the Lamb

- **And I looked, and I heard as a voice of many agents all around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands, saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that has been killed to receive the power, and wealth, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!**
- **And every creature that is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and is in the sea, and things in them all, I heard saying, The blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion is to him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, into the ages of the ages. Truly! And the four living creatures were saying the Truly. And the elders fell down and worshiped** (Revelation 5:11-14).

Not only does the population of heaven worship and praise God, but they also worship and praise his Son Jesus Christ. And we should also worship and praise God's Son, especially because of the great sacrifice he made to become our Savior.

John said he heard every creature speaking praises. However, some of those praises may be figurative, like the declaration of the heavens mentioned in this passage: **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork"** (Psalm 19:1). The heavens and all creatures praise God in various ways, some consciously and willfully with words, and some by simply existing to show the glory of his creative wisdom and power.

### Our Lives in the World

This next part of Revelation is a description of what happened after the Lamb opened the seven seals of the book that God gave him. Remember, I believe that book symbolizes God's plan for developing sons of God for eternity. And opening the seven seals of it presented an overview of that plan. That overview was presented in very figurative language, which I interpret as describing (1) the four natural forces of life in the world, (2) how righteous souls are persecuted by sinners in the world but are rewarded in heaven, and (3) God's wrath against those sinners.

## The four great forces of earthly life

Opening each of the first four seals of the book brought forth a horse, each of a different color. Those horses are what have come to be called the four horses of the Apocalypse (which is another word for Revelation). Since horses symbolize force (e.g., horsepower), I believe those horses symbolize the four great forces of life in the world. The science of physics says there are only four fundamental forces of nature: strong, weak, electromagnetic, and gravitational. Those are the four basic forces of the elemental things. These horses described in Revelation seem to symbolize the four basic forces of life in this world of tribulation.

### A white horse

- **And I saw that the Lamb opened one of the seven seals. And I heard one of the four living creatures saying like the sound of thunder, Come and see. And behold, a white horse, and he who sits on it having a bow. And a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering, and so that he might conquer** (Revelation 6:1-2).

The white horse and its rider symbolize the force of life and human development. And that force prevails (conquers), because regardless of how much death and destruction may happen, life virtually always reappears, and the growth and progress of mankind continues. The bow and the crown symbolize the power to conquer and rule. And so it is with life in the world.

Even the great disaster at Chernobyl, which poisoned a large area with radioactivity, has not prevented the return of both plant and animal life. Consider this report from the website <http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/story.jsp?story=20892>:

Chernobyl, the scene of the world's worst nuclear accident, has defied the gloomiest of prophecies by becoming one of Europe's richest wildlife habitats, teeming with endangered species.

The evacuation of tens of thousands of residents living in the 30km exclusion zone around the Ukrainian reactor has resulted in a flourishing community of plants and animals whose diversity has stunned biologists.

Radioactive fallout from the explosion and fire contaminated 2,800sq km of Ukraine and Belarus, which resulted in the evacuation of 135,000 people and 35,000 cattle and left dozens of towns and villages deserted.

Although the exclusion zone has been subjected to some of the worst radioactive contamination in history, life in all its forms has proved to be remarkably resistant to the known biological effects of radiation, notably mutations and birth deformities.

Scientists studying the site from the International Radioecology Laboratory just outside the zone have reported a startling return of many rare species to the area and a general increase in the diversity of many wild plants and animals.

British biologists involved in the study of the region have called for the zone to become a nature reserve where endangered fauna and flora can be free to breed in

what is becoming a pristine habitat. Arable farmland and pasture has been slowly replaced by weeds and meadows as the land returns to its original forested state.

Large European mammals, such as moose, wild boar, roe and red deer, beavers, wolves, badgers, otters and lynx have become well established within the zone, while species associated with man -- such as rats, house mice, sparrows and pigeons -- have declined. Michail Bondarkov, the director of the laboratory, said that 48 endangered species listed in the international Red Book of protected animals and plants are now thriving in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

The rider of the white horse continues going forth to conquer and conquering even with such disasters.

### A fiery red horse

- **And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. And another horse came forth, fiery red. And it was given to him (to him who sits on it) to take peace from the earth, so that they would kill each other. And a great sword was given to him (Revelation 6:3-4).**

The red horse and its rider symbolize the force of conflict and strife that occurs between, among, and within the beasts and men, and even between, among, and within the plants of the world. And that conflict and strife can be seen everywhere throughout the world, from the largest to the smallest of living things.

As one commentator of a TV program about life in a typical pond said, "It is a busy world here in the pond. Eating and being eaten." And that is true throughout the world of nature, which is appropriately called the wild kingdom. It is called wild because conflict and strife are natural parts of it. I also remember what the woman of a husband-wife survivalist team said after being in a jungle, a place teeming with life: "It is a beautiful place, but everything in it attacks you." Darwin called it "the war of nature."

As we all know, conflict and strife within human civilization also exists, although it is reduced by appointed officials who attempt to maintain peace and order. We who belong to Christ work to promote peace and order, but peace cannot exist without opposing sin and wickedness.

In this world there is no complete escape from the power of the fiery red horse and its rider. Virtually every generation suffers to some degree from quarreling, wars, and various kinds of fightings among men. Even before the flood, when all creatures ate only plants (see Genesis 1:29-30), there was still conflict and strife, just as there is among herbivorous beasts now.

### A black horse

- **And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come and see. And behold, a black horse, and he who sits on it having a balance in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius.**

- **And thou may not harm the olive oil and the wine** (Revelation 6:5-6).

The black horse and its rider symbolize the struggle and labor needed for survival, which is necessary for all living things. Regarding the struggle for survival, I copied these words from <http://www.darwinendlessforms.org/gallerydarwin/struggle-for-existence>:

In *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin claimed that there was a continual “struggle for existence” in nature, in which only the fittest would survive. This theory came partly from his reading of Thomas Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus and his followers believed that the earth could never support the numbers of human beings and other creatures that were born. For Darwin, the inevitability of a struggle for survival was the key to evolution by “natural selection.” Any individual plants and animals that happened to vary in an advantageous way would be more likely to triumph over their competitors. Only the survivors would produce offspring, which might diversify and develop further, to fill any available ecological niche. New species very gradually came into being [evolved], while many old species became extinct.

Darwin’s theory of the evolution of species now dominates the world’s thinking. What he said about the struggle for existence in the world is obviously true. But the idea that species evolve is ridiculous. It has never been seen, and it never will. It is the result of a great delusion, which God has sent against them: “... **they** [unrepentant sinners] **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 2:10-12).

Regarding the oil and wine mentioned in the above passage in Revelation, they symbolize comfort and pleasure, for the proverb says, “**He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil shall not be rich**” (Proverbs 21:17). Thus, in spite of the need to struggle and labor for survival, there will always be some comfort and pleasure.

## A green horse

- **And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature saying, Come and see. And behold, a green horse, and he who sits on top of it. His name was Death, and Hades followed with him. And authority was given to him over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with starvation, and with what is deadly, and by the beasts of the earth** (Revelation 6:7-8).

The green horse and its rider, the last one, symbolize death. Other versions say it was a pale horse, but the Greek word in the original document means green, as in green grass.

Perhaps the green horse and its rider symbolize death because I am told the skin of a dead man first changes to a greenish color. For example, the following description is what one website (<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/forensicmedicine/notes/timedead.pdf>) said about it:

Typically, the first visible sign of putrefaction is a greenish discolouration of the skin of the anterior abdominal wall. This most commonly begins in the right iliac fossa, i.e. over the area of the caecum, (where the contents of the bowel are more fluid and full

of bacteria), but occasionally, the first changes are peri-umbilical, or in the left iliac fossa. The [greenish] discolouration, due to sulph-haemoglobin formation, spreads to involve the entire anterior abdominal wall, and then the flanks, chest, limbs and face.

## Those four forces

Those four horses and their riders symbolize the four forces that govern the basic nature of life everywhere in the world. And they cannot be avoided, because in this world there will always be life and human development, conflict, struggle and labor for survival, and death. Those forces have all operated in the world from the time of Creation, except in the garden of Eden, although before the flood God seems to have created the world outside of the garden with less conflict. Remember, there were no carnivorous beasts then. And it may also have been less difficult to survive before the flood. And also remember the average lifespan of men who lived before the flood was over 900 years.

God creates life and human development. Satan is also called “a great fiery red dragon” (see Revelation 12:3). And he creates conflict and strife in the world. The struggle for survival followed by death are the consequences of conflict and strife. Hence, the force of life and development is followed by the force of conflict and strife. And that force is followed by the force of struggling to survive. And that force is followed by death.

Those four forces create the inevitable cycle of life in the world. The white horse and its rider are followed by the fiery red horse and its rider, which are followed by the black horse and its rider. And they are all followed by the green horse and its rider. Life and development, conflict, struggle for survival, and death. That is the natural cycle of life in this sinful world.

Opening the next two seals describes the conflict between righteous men and sinners. And that is also a fundamental part of our lives in the world.

## The righteous will be persecuted

- **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).**

Opening the fifth seal revealed how the righteous suffer great persecution from sinners on the earth, but are rewarded in heaven. Notice how they cried out to God that he would judge and avenge their blood from those who dwell on the earth. But those righteous souls were given a white robe and told to be patient and continue to rest for a time. God is allowing sinners to shed the blood (literally and figuratively) of his sanctified souls until he decides to end the world.

Regarding vengeance, the world hates it, and they have persuaded most modern believers that God hates it too. But vengeance is justice, and God and his genuine sanctified souls love justice. Therefore, his martyred sons that are in heaven were not criticized for pleading for vengeance. Remember, however, we are not to avenge ourselves personally. For Paul said, “... **it is written** [in the law of Moses], **Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord**” (Romans 12:19). If each man sought to apply his own vengeance, the world would be filled with chaos.

The Lord said he will repay. And he uses the world’s offices of authority as some of his instruments to apply his vengeance, as Paul said in this passage: “**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 13:3-4).

Those offices of authority are helpers of God, vengeful for wrath against evildoers. And they themselves sin when they fail to do so, which is happening more and more now in pagan America.

## Sinners will be punished

- **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).

That passage describes what will happen on the earth at the end of the world. When the disciples of Jesus asked him about the end of the world, among other things in his answer, he said, “**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. 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 24:29-31). That description Jesus gave is very similar to the one in the above passage in Revelation.

Those descriptions are simple summaries of what will no doubt be a very complex event. For example, we know the stars as they are now cannot literally fall to the earth. What God may do is shrink each star into a tiny mass of matter, after which he will cause them to fall to the earth. For scientists say that all matter is mostly empty space. And also I believe the earth is the center of the universe. Nevertheless, who knows what new knowledge men will acquire to help explain more precisely what the end could be like? What is important are the lessons taught in the Bible about being prepared for the end.

## The righteous escape God's wrath

- **And after this I saw four agents standing at the four corners of the earth, restraining the four winds of the earth, so that wind would not blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. And I saw another agent ascending from the rising of the sun, having a seal of the living God. And he cried out in a great voice to the four agents to whom it was given to them to harm the earth and the sea, saying, Do not harm the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we may seal the bondmen of our God on their foreheads (Revelation 7:1-3).**

Those words say to us that God allows no harm to come to the earth until he identifies those who belong to him. The seal on their foreheads is, of course, figurative. That passage is similar to the one in the book of Ezekiel which also tells how God commanded to first identify the righteous souls in the world before he sends his wrath.

That passage says, **“Then he [Jehovah] cried in my ears [of Ezekiel] with a loud voice, saying, Cause ye those who have charge over the city to draw near, each man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lies toward the north, each man with his slaughter weapon in his hand, and one man in the midst of them clothed in linen, with a writer's case by his side.**

**“And they went in, and stood beside the brazen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub, upon which it was, to the threshold of the house, and he called to the man clothed in linen who had the writer's case by his side. And Jehovah said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and who cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst of it.**

**“And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye through the city after him, and smite. Let not your eye spare, nor have ye pity. Kill utterly the old man, the young man, and the virgin, and little sons, and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the old men who were before the house” (Ezekiel 9:1-6).**

The six men with their slaughter weapons were obviously heavenly agents of God (invisible to men) who came at his command to execute his wrath upon the sinners. Notice however, they could not begin the slaughter until they had identified all the men who sighed and who cried over all the abominations that were done in the midst of Jerusalem. There will never be a soul upon the earth who grieves about all of its sin and wickedness that will not be identified by God, and he will have his eternal spirit spared from his wrath.

Nevertheless, that does not mean every soul who suffers some kind of tragedy is suffering from God's wrath. Remember the story of Job and how much he suffered. God allows the righteous to suffer many things in this world, but their eternal spirits are always spared from his wrath.

And always remember, sometimes our suffering is chastening from God. For Jesus said, **"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent"** (Revelation 3:19). Also remember what Solomon said: **"In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider"** (Ecclesiastes 7:14). In the day of adversity do some soul searching to consider how you may have need to repent of something.

## The number of those sealed

- **And I heard the number of those sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel. Twelve thousand were sealed from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin, were sealed** (Revelation 7:4-8).

That passage is also very figurative. Remember, the number twelve is another number that symbolizes fullness. What those hundred and forty-four thousand symbolize is the population of all the children of God upon the earth, with members from all the nations, which is symbolized by the twelve tribes of Israel. And those righteous souls needed to be identified so they would not suffer punishment with the rest of the world.

That list of names of the tribes of Israel is very unusual, and Bible commentators disagree about what it means. Neither Dan nor Ephraim are mentioned, while Levi and Joseph were. Both Dan and Ephraim were given tribal territories in the land of Israel, but Levi and Joseph were not. The descendants of Levi were given no tribal territory because Levi had been so sinful. There was no tribe of Joseph because he was so righteous that Jacob (also called Israel) gave him two tribes by adopting his first two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Perhaps God is saying he is not bound by any human laws of inheritance or anything else. If you want other explanations about why that list is so unusual you can study the commentaries for yourself.

In the Bible God used various ways to express what he wanted to say. And sometimes it takes some study to understand. Indeed, Jesus sometimes spoke riddles, which he did not explain. For example, when the Jews warned him that king Herod wanted to kill him, Jesus only said, **"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 13:32). Even Jesus' disciples did not understand what he meant until after his resurrection.

The nation of Israel was the one that God chose to be his own among all the nations of the world. And it was in the nation of Israel that his holy word the Bible was written. And it

was in the nation of Israel that his only begotten Son Jesus Christ came into the world to bring salvation to all who believe and obey him. And it was in the nation of Israel that the kingdom of God, his holy church, was established.

But now the chosen people of God are the members of the Church of Christ. And those hundred and forty-four thousand that were sealed symbolize all of the children of God upon the earth. And that includes souls **“out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues,”** as described in the next passage of Revelation.

Paul described who God recognizes as the true sons of Israel, when he was writing to the Gentile Christians in Rome. He said that a real Jew was determined by a man’s heart and not his flesh: **“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).

And he said later that the real children of God were the children of the promise, and not children of Israel in the flesh: **“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). And the children of the promise are now those who believe and obey Jesus Christ.

## Saved for heaven

- **After these things, I looked and lo, a great multitude, which none could number, out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, and crying out in a great voice, saying, Salvation is in our God who sits upon the throne, and in the Lamb!**
- **And all the agents had stood all around the throne, and the elders, and the four living creatures, and they fell before his throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Truly! Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and strength, is for our God into the ages of the ages. Truly!** (Revelation 7:9-12).

The previous passage was about identifying the chosen people of God upon the earth. The above passage is about the chosen people of God who had been taken to heaven. The smaller number of those upon the earth symbolizes all the chosen people of God from each generation. The larger multitude which none could number was all the chosen people of God from every generation.

Although the number of sons of God **“out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues”** was so great that none could number them, nevertheless God knows every one, and he knows the exact number, even to the number of hairs on their heads. For remember Jesus said, **“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered”** (Matthew 10:30). And all those righteous souls will be gathered together in heaven to be clothed in white robes, regardless of how poor and lowly they were upon the earth. And they will have the great privilege of standing around the throne of God to worship and praise him.

## Those out of the great tribulation

- **And one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these who are clothed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, My lord, thou know. And he said to me, These are those coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple.**
- **And he who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They will hunger no more, nor will they thirst any more. The sun will, no, not fall upon them, nor any heat. Because the Lamb in the midst of the throne will tend them, and will lead them to fountains of waters of life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes** (Revelation 7:13-17).

Remember, the “great tribulation” is life in this world of sin, and not merely a more troubled time in history. The above passage says that those righteous souls were **“coming out of the great tribulation.”** That indicates there are some disciples of Christ who will be resurrected before the final judgment to serve God **“day and night in his temple.”** And that is a continuing process. Their numbers are continuing to increase, because they are still coming out of this great tribulation.

Revelation speaks of the temple of God that currently exists in heaven. And that temple is no doubt huge compared with any earthly temple. And perhaps the walls and covering of that temple can somehow be retracted or become transparent so that the throne of God could be seen from outside of it. For remember this passage: **“And I looked, and I heard as a voice of many agents all around the throne and the living creatures and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands ...”** (Revelation 5:11).

That temple is in the capital city of heaven, which is also called Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem. For remember this passage: **“But ye have come to mount Zion, and to the city of a living God, a heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of agents ...”** (Hebrews 12:22). Nevertheless, that temple will end with the coming of the new Jerusalem, because John said about that city, **“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb”** (Revelation 21:22).

## The seventh seal

- **And when he opened the seventh seal, silence occurred in heaven, like half an hour** (Revelation 8:1).

After the creation of our world God rested on the seventh day (see Genesis 2:2). Hence the short time of silence after the seventh seal was opened seems to signal the end of that overview of the nature of existence in this world. Each of the first six seals symbolize part of that nature:

The first seal: The force of life.

The second seal: The force of conflict and strife.

The third seal: The force of labor and struggle for survival.

The fourth seal: The force of death.

The fifth seal: Those who love and obey God are persecuted in the world but saved for heaven.

The sixth seal: Those who hate and disobey God experience his wrath, but those who love and obey him are given glory and honor in heaven.

That summary of the nature of our world includes both the material and the spiritual aspects of it. And both the material and spiritual aspects of it include tribulations. For Jesus said to his disciples, **“In the world ye have tribulation. But cheer up, I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

## God’s curses against the world

The next part of Revelation seems to focus on the conflict between God and the sinners of the world. And it explains why there are so many disasters here, both natural and man-made. For not only is this a world in the bondage of corruption, but God sends curses (woes) against it because of the sinfulness of men.

The language in Revelation about those curses is very symbolic. However, in the book of Deuteronomy you can read a literal and very vivid description of curses that God said he would send against his people Israel if they sinned against him (see 28:15-68). And remember, the book of Lamentations describes those curses that they later suffered because they turned away from Jehovah. God sends curses against every nation that sins against him. Remember the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19), and the plagues of Egypt (see Exodus 7-12).

This part of Revelation also describes how God proclaims his will to the world but they reject it. It describes how God fights for the righteous, and how he punishes those who oppress them. It also describes how God reveals knowledge about himself to mankind in the world.

## Trumpets, prayers, and incense

- **And I saw the seven agents who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another agent came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. And much incense was given to him, so that he would give with the prayers of all the sanctified upon the golden altar before the throne. And the vapor of the incense, with the prayers of the sanctified, ascended before God out of the agent’s hand.**
- **And the agent who took the censer, also filled it from the fire of the altar, and cast it to the earth. And there occurred thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven agents who have the seven trumpets prepared themselves so that they might sound** (Revelation 8:2-6).

A censer is a hand held instrument containing incense for worship. Offering incense was part of the worship commanded by the law of Moses. And being able to use a censer indicated authority to lead men in worship. In ancient Israel incense was burned in the house of God as a pleasing aroma to him. And the above passage suggests our prayers are enhanced on their way to God to make them more pleasing. For remember Paul said, **“... for we know not what we would pray for as we ought ...”** (Romans 8:26).

The fire of the heavenly altar was used not only to burn the incense as a pleasing aroma to God, but also to express wrath against the world. For the thunders, lightnings, and earthquake in the above passage caused by that fire seem to symbolize the power of that wrath. The voices in that passage seem to symbolize the word of God that is preached by his witnesses.

Those things in that passage of Revelation are figurative words to show how God listens to the prayers of the sanctified. And that is encouragement for all men who endure the trials and temptations of this life and remain faithful to him. They also symbolize how he deliberately sends troubles to the world, which is explained in the next passages in Revelation.

## Curses against nature

The book next tells about the heavenly agents with trumpets that announced different kinds of curses. The descriptions are, of course, very figurative. Here are the first four:

- **And the first sounded, and there occurred hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth. And the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.**
- **And the second agent sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was cast into the sea. And the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures in the sea (those having lives) died, and the third part of the ships was destroyed.**
- **And the third agent sounded, and a great star fell from the heaven burning like a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the springs of the waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood oil. And the third part of the waters developed into wormwood oil, and many of the men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.**
- **And the fourth agent sounded, and the third part of the sun was struck, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars, so that the third part of them would be darkened. And the day did not shine the third part of it, and likewise the night** (Revelation 8:7-12).

Those four disasters seem to symbolize curses against all the natural parts of the world, as suggested by this passage: **“And worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and springs of waters”** (Revelation 14:6-7). Like the curses above, that passage mentions only those four parts of nature, but they no doubt symbolize every part of it, because God made every part.

I believe the words “the third part” in those passages simply mean a minority part. Thus, when the first trumpet sounded a minority part of the earth was subjected to destruction. When the second trumpet sounded a minority part of the sea and the things in it were subjected to destruction. When the third trumpet sounded a minority part of the fresh waters was subjected to destruction, which caused many men to die. When the fourth trumpet sounded a minority part of the light from the celestial bodies was darkened. Perhaps that refers to whatever things may obscure vision causing death and destruction.

Those first four curses were sent against the natural things of our world. The lesson seems to be that such disasters occur because God sends curses against it. He sends curses because there is so much sin and rebellion against him here. Men war against God and commit all kinds of folly and wickedness, and the curses he sends are among the ways he punishes them. Yet those rebels deny being guilty, and they accuse God of cruelty for sending them.

Remember how God cursed Adam after he sinned: **“... cursed is the ground for thy sake. In toil thou shalt eat of it all the days of thy life. Also, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it thou were taken. For thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return”** (Genesis 3:17-19). And remember how God cursed Cain after Cain murdered his brother: **“And now cursed are thou from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand. When thou till the ground, it shall not henceforth yield to thee its strength. A fugitive and a wanderer thou shalt be on the earth”** (Genesis 4:11-12).

Therefore, dear reader, do not wonder why there are so many plagues, earthquakes, storms, floods, and other disasters of nature. They are responses by God against mankind who have rebelled against him.

Nevertheless, those disasters are not always for the worst of sinners, as revealed by this passage: **“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).

Moreover, God’s sanctified souls are not protected from all disasters. For example, the Bible tells how the faithful apostle Paul suffered through a violent storm at sea. Here is part of that story: **“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. 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 27:18-26).

There were two hundred seventy-six souls on board that great ship, and they had been so storm-tossed that they had not eaten anything for fourteen days. Therefore, Paul encouraged them to eat from the bread they had remaining to strengthen them for the shipwreck

that would place them on the island. Paul had suffered along with all of those other souls from that terrible storm at sea.

God does not protect those who belong to him from all of the plagues and disasters that afflict the earth. Therefore, be not grieved if some innocent souls suffer with the guilty, for that is a consequence of all sin. In this world the innocent always suffer to some extent because of the sins of the guilty.

As God said about idols in the second of the ten commandments, **“Thou shall not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, Jehovah thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”** (Exodus 20:5-6).

The bodies of innocent sons suffer because of the iniquity of their fathers, but their eternal souls are not affected. They only become condemned when they themselves sin and refuse to repent.

And also remember what Jesus said to his disciples: **“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). Nobody can suffer in any way without God allowing it. And if some innocent souls suffer from natural disasters or in any other way, remember what 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). God sometimes allows the innocent to suffer here on the earth with the guilty, but he saves their souls for eternity in the greater world of heaven.

Therefore, let not scoffers provoke you to accuse God when you suffer. Remember what the Bible says about Job after he was afflicted with so many terrible things: **“Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped. And he said, Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah. In all this Job did not sin, nor foolishly accuse God”** (Job 1:20-22).

Job was a very great man of righteousness (although he was not a perfect man like Jesus Christ.) Yet God allowed Job to suffer in virtually every way:

the violent death of all his children

the painful sores all over his body

his complete ignorance about why all those things happened to him

all the false accusations his friends continually made against him

Nevertheless, Job never accused God. It was his wife who criticized God, because the book says, **“Then his wife said to him, Do thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God, and die. But he said to her, Thou speak as one of the foolish women speaks. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job did not sin with his lips”** (Job 2:9-10). All that Job did while he was suffering was to plead to God for mercy, question why he was suffering, and defend himself.

## Curses against sinners

- **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).**

That passage speaks of three woes. Woes are curses, and those three woes that resulted from the trumpet sounds were specifically against sinful men.

## The curse of locusts

- **And the fifth agent sounded, and I saw a star fallen from the sky to the earth. And the key of the pit of the abyss was given to him. And he opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke ascended out of the pit, like smoke of a burning furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened from the smoke of the pit. And locusts came forth out of the smoke upon the earth, and power was given to them, like the scorpions of the earth have power.**
- **And it was told them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor anything green, nor any tree, except the men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them that they would not kill them, but that they would be tormented five months. And their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. And in those days men will seek death, and will, no, not find it. And they will long to die, and death will flee from them.**
- **And the likeness of the locusts was similar to horses prepared for battle. And upon their heads were like golden crowns, and their faces were as men's faces. And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were as of lions. And they had breastplates like iron breastplates. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots of many horses running into battle.**
- **And they have tails similar to scorpions, and stings. And in their tails they have power to hurt men five months. Having a king over them, the agent of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in the Greek he has the name Apollyon (Revelation 9:1-11).**

The fifth trumpet announced a curse that was against all men who do not have the seal of God upon them. Those monstrous locusts may symbolize evil spirits that God set loose to torment sinners. For they are said to have come from the pit of the abyss, which seems to be a prison for evil spirits. An example of God sending an evil spirit against a sinner is the case of king Saul: **“Now the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him”** (First Samuel 16:14).

The Spirit of Jehovah had come upon Saul to strengthen him after God selected him to become the first king of Israel. But not long afterward Saul began to disobey God. Therefore, God withdrew his supporting Spirit from him and he sent an evil spirit against him.

What I think the passage in Revelation about the locusts means is that all men who do not believe and obey God are subjected to certain mental torments for an appreciable part of their lives. Those torments only happen to unrepentant sinners. And they are severe enough during the time of their suffering for them to want to die, but they will not take their own lives, probably because of fear of death. How sinners suffer those torments no doubt varies widely. And for each individual those torments may be spread out over time or they may happen only on occasion.

The sky being darkened may mean that those sinners are kept from understanding about their mental torments. And the crowns of those tormentors may mean their sufferings rule over them and are inescapable. And their savage appearance suggests they rule over them with brutality.

The lesson seems to be that the minds of unrepentant sinners suffer severely and inescapably in certain ways during part of their lives that the sanctified of God never experience. Perhaps that fifth curse produces a form of mental anguish and torment that only unrepentant sinners suffer. Such sufferings may help explain why so many sinners become drunkards and drug addicts. Those substances dull their pains, but they also dull their minds and do much harm to their lives.

The faith and obedience of the sanctified keep them immune from that kind of mental suffering. They experience an inner peace from God that cannot be understood, 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 passage in Revelation says the agent of the abyss was king over those locusts (the evil spirits). That agent probably controls such things about them as who they can torment and when. That is just another indication of how God has the ultimate control of the world, and no harm can happen without his permission.

## Two woes yet to come

- **One woe is departed, behold, two woes yet come after these** (Revelation 9:12).

The second woe seems to be about words, and how God curses men because of how they use them. They use evil words, and God causes those words to create harm against them. They also oppose good words, words of truth about God and his will for us. How their words create evil against them is described figuratively in these next passages of Revelation. The part about how they oppose the truth of God and his will for us is told after that.

## Armies of horsemen

- **And the sixth agent sounded, and I heard a voice, one from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth agent who has the trumpet, Loose the four agents who have been bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four agents were loosed, who were prepared for the hour and**

for the day and month and year, so that they would kill the third part of men.

- **And the number of the armies of the horsemen was ten thousands of ten thousands. I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and those who sit on them having breastplates fiery red, and hyacinth color, and brimstone.**
- **And the heads of the horses are like heads of lions, and out of their mouths come fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three plagues the third part of men was killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails. For their tails are similar to serpents, having heads, and by them they injure.**
- **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 9:13-21).**

That curse is primarily against sinners, and it causes the death of a minority of them. Although it is primarily against sinners, the text does not say it is for them only, as it does in the fifth curse. The text says the men were killed by the fire, smoke, and brimstone out of the mouths of the horses. Thus, the sixth curse seems to refer to the ways men are injured and killed as a result of the force (symbolized by horses) of destructive words that come out of their mouths, and that sometimes afflicts the righteous also.

Words express ideas, and evil ideas can provoke enormous death and destruction, which can erupt with volcanic violence. Evil words can certainly be like fire, smoke, and brimstone. Evil words can be a result of gossip, slander, false teachings, seductive flattery, insults, lies, and many other ways that words are used to provoke various other kinds of evil, including great violence such as rioting and war. Just consider what the mouth of Adolph Hitler provoked. He never fired a shot, but with his words only he provoked an enormously destructive war.

Such evil and destructive words can sometimes appear very colorful to the naive, like fire, smoke, and brimstone, but beware of how deadly they are. Modern rock-and-roll and “rap” music are also examples.

James warned about the power of the tongue for destruction when he said, **“Behold we put bits into the mouths of horses for them to obey us, and we guide about their whole body. Behold also the ships, being so great and driven by fierce winds, are guided about by a very small rudder, wherever the impulse of the man who steers determines.**

**“So also the tongue is a little body-part, and boasts greatly. Behold a little fire, how much wood it kindles. 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 3:3-6).**

And although the righteous are not immune from such words, unrepentant sinners seem to suffer the most from them. The righteous are much less inclined to allow their behavior to be influenced by false and harmful words. Nevertheless, no man is immune from the effects of them.

It is difficult to understand what is the significance of the river Euphrates in that description. God intended for that to be the northern border of the land he promised to give to the sons of Israel. For Moses said to them, **“Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours, from the wilderness, and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even to the hinder sea shall be your border”** (Deuteronomy 11:24).

Instead of conquering all of the land as God commanded, they quit trying after they won enough to settle there. Since the Euphrates is mentioned in the above passage of Revelation, that may be intended to remind men about that failure by the ancient Israelites to destroy all the people that God had condemned. And that suggests man’s failure to obey God’s will to combat evil will cause him to release some of his agents to punish them.

That failure to combat evil behavior is very widespread in pagan America, both with the people and with their rulers. Indeed, our sinful rulers have created many laws to make it more difficult to combat evil behavior. That pleases the guilty and increases the profits of defense lawyers, but lawlessness is increasing and more innocent souls are suffering.

The evil philosophy of humanism is at the heart of those sins against the will of God. I say with great sorrow that humanism is destroying this great country of mine, yet the people are blind to its destructiveness.

The next part of revelation seems to be about the knowledge of God.

## The seven thunders

- **And I saw a mighty agent coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire, and having in his hand an opened book. And he placed his right foot upon the sea, and the left upon the earth.**
- **And he cried out in a great voice as a lion roars. And when he cried out, the seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders uttered, I was going to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up what the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them** (Revelation 10:1-4).

I believe the opened book in the hand of the mighty agent was a heavenly record of the will of God for men, which record we find in the Holy Bible. I believe that because of what Revelation says about that book in the passage after the next one. Perhaps what the voices of the seven thunders uttered was the word of God for us spoken directly from heaven. And we are not allowed to hear such words, because knowledge of God’s will for us can only come through God’s holy prophets and his Son Jesus Christ. And our only record of that knowledge now is in the Holy Bible.

God certainly has the power to speak to the world directly from heaven. Remember, he spoke that way from mount Sinai when he gave the sons of Israel the ten commandments (see Exodus 20). And at the day of Pentecost there were many foreign visitors in Jerusalem, yet when the apostles preached, each man heard in his native language (see Acts 2).

God has the power to speak so that the whole world could hear what he was saying. But he does not want to speak that way. He uses humble souls to proclaim his word to the humble.

### The mighty agent announces

- **And the agent whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth raised his right hand to heaven, and swore by him who lives into the ages of the ages, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that time would be no more. But in the days of the voice of the seventh agent, when he is going to sound, even the mystery of God is finished, as he declared the good news to his bondmen the prophets** (Revelation 10:5-7).

Remember, there are two kinds of swearing. One kind is to insure that what is said is true. That is the kind required in court testimony. And that is the kind Jesus forbade among us. He forbade it because he wants whatever we say to always be true, and not require an oath for confirmation (see Matthew 5:33-37).

The other kind of swearing is to emphasize that what is said will be done. For example, the author of the book of Hebrews told how God swore an oath to Abraham: **“For God who promised to Abraham, since he had none greater to swear by, swore by himself, saying, Surely indeed, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee”** (Hebrews 6:13-14). That was the kind of oath that the mighty agent from heaven swore.

Notice how the mighty agent told of the supremacy of God. He told how God lives into the ages of the ages, meaning he has always existed and always will. He told how he created the heaven and all the things in it, which includes the heavenly realm where God resides. He also told of how God created the earth and the things in it, as well as the sea and the things in it. In other words, God created everything that exists anywhere.

When the mighty agent said that time would be no more, he meant there would be no more delay before the voice of the seventh agent sounded. And that would mean the mystery of God was finished, **“as he declared the good news to his bondmen the prophets.”**

The mystery of God, as he declared the good news to his prophets, refers to the good news of our salvation, which was brought to us by his Son Jesus Christ and proclaimed by his apostles. Paul spoke of that, when he said to the brothers at Rome, **“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).

The book of Revelation speaks of that next.

### The will of God for man

- **And the voice that I heard from heaven was again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the little book that has been opened in the hand of the agent who stands upon the sea and upon the earth. And I went to the agent,**

telling him to give me the little book. And he says to me, Take and eat it. And it will make thy belly bitter, but it will be sweet as honey in thy mouth.

- **And I took the book out of the agent's hand, and ate it. And it was sweet as honey in my mouth, and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. And he says to me, Thou must prophesy again against many peoples, and against nations and tongues and kings** (Revelation 10:8-11).

The book John ate symbolizes knowledge of the good news of Christ. The book tasted sweet to him, because for righteous men like John, knowledge of our salvation provides great encouragement and comfort to our spirits. It is joy to our spirit because it proclaims truth, justice, and righteousness, and it gives us hope of eternal life. It is delightful nourishment for the souls of those who love truth, justice, and righteousness.

It made John's belly bitter, because obedience to the good new of Christ is sorrow to our flesh. It is sorrow because what it commands is against our evil lusts of the flesh. For remember these words of Paul: **"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 5:17).

Jesus warned his disciples that obedience to him causes suffering in the flesh, when he said to them, **"If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"** (Matthew 16:24), and, **"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life because of me will find it"** (Matthew 10:39). Losing our life is figurative for sacrificing the lusts and sinful desires of our bodies. Thus the book was sweet to John's mouth which symbolized his spirit, but bitter to his belly which symbolized his flesh.

## Witnessing for Christ

- **And there was given me a reed similar to a rod, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. And leave out the court outside the temple, and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations. And they will trample the holy city forty-two months. And I will give to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth. These men are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, having stood before the Lord of the earth.**
- **And if any man wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouth and devours their enemies. And if any man wants to harm them, he must be killed this way. These men have authority to shut the sky, so that it may not rain the days of their prophecy. And they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they may desire** (Revelation 11:1-6).

The temple, the altar, and the worshipers may symbolize the church. For remember, Paul said to the disciples at 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). And perhaps John was commanded to take special recognition of all the sanctified of God (members of Christ's church) but ignore the unbelievers.

The unbelievers of the world are allowed to persecute the church for a time, which time is a half cycle. Seven symbolizes completeness, and forty-two months is half of seven years. Since everything cycles in this world, then they were allowed to trample the holy city (the church) for a half cycle of time.

I believe the two men mentioned in that passage symbolize the small number of humble and lowly men who proclaim the genuine good news of Christ to the world. They were likened to olive trees and lampstands because by their teachings they brought forth much good fruit and light into the world. And the truth of their words destroys the effectiveness of the men who seek to combat their teachings.

Also they have the power (through prayer) to bring plagues upon the earth, even to withhold rain from the sky. As James said about Elijah, **“A working supplication of a righteous man is very powerful. Elijah was a man of the same nature as we. And by prayer, he asked for it not to rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit”** (James 5:16-18).

Nevertheless, such men will not use that power quickly or without full justification, as in the case with Elijah when he thought he was the only righteous man left in Israel. He said to Jehovah, after all his efforts to bring the sons of Israel back to God had failed, **“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”** (First Kings 19:10).

God now reveals vital knowledge of himself and of his will to his disciples through the words of the Bible. And the spirits of some of them, humble and lowly men, are aroused to be witnesses to proclaim that knowledge of him, and to preach his will to the rest of the world. Yet the world rejects their efforts. And they persecute all of God’s disciples, especially those who serve as his witnesses to proclaim him and his will for mankind. When disciples of Christ act as witnesses of God, he gives them the power to send plagues upon the earth if they pray for them. He also protects them so that the truth of their words will defeat all who would harm their efforts.

### God’s witnesses are defeated

- **And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war with them, and he will overcome them and kill them. And their corpses are in the thoroughfare of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.**
- **And out of the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations they see their corpses three and a half days. And they will not allow their corpses to be put in a sepulcher. And those who dwell upon the earth rejoice over them, and will celebrate, and will give gifts to each other, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth** (Revelation 11:7-10).

Those are also figurative words, and here is what I believe they mean. When God considers the testimony of his witnesses to be full and sufficient he will allow an evil beast from the abyss to defeat and destroy those righteous men who were proclaiming the word of

God. That beast is later described, but I will say now I believe it symbolizes **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age”** (Ephesians 6:12).

Although it says that beast will destroy God’s witnesses, it probably means some literally and some figuratively, and not all at the same time. And their defeat will bring rejoicing and celebration by their enemies, because those witnesses tormented the sinful men on the earth. They tormented them by condemning their sinfulness, and by calling for plagues from God to punish them. Remember what Jesus said: **“The world ... hates me because I testify about it, that its works are evil”** (John 7:7).

That great city, which was spiritually called Sodom, and Egypt, and Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified, symbolizes centers of civilization that are sinful and opposed to God. Sodom was morally corrupt, Egypt persecuted God’s people severely, and Jerusalem crucified the Son of God. The sinners of the world will slander and abuse the memory of those witnesses for God, and they will rejoice greatly because of their defeat. They will rejoice because those men, who proclaimed the truth of God to them, rebuked and condemned them for their sinfulness. And sinners hate criticism and rebuke.

### The victory of the witnesses

- **And after the three and a half days a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon those who watched them. And I heard a great voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they ascended up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.**
- **And in that day a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city fell. And seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake. And the rest became afraid, and gave glory to the God of heaven** (Revelation 11:11-13).

That description is, of course, also very figurative, and here is what I think it means. For a short half cycle of time the world thought all those who proclaim the truth of God had been defeated and eliminated, and they rejoiced because of their defeat. But not long afterward God caused something to happen to greatly enhance the reputation of his witnesses in the sight of the world. And the realization by the population of what they had done to God’s witnesses sent fear into their hearts. At the same time great disasters struck and killed many of them. That contributed to their fear, and they turned to God to honor him.

I do not believe all of those things refer to a single time in history. They probably symbolize a cyclic pattern. A cyclic pattern that begins with a lengthy (but variable) time when righteous souls will be persecuted, and a few of them, humble and lowly men, will proclaim the true word of God. That is followed by a shorter time when the testimony of God will seem to suffer total defeat. After which God will cause something in the world to shock their persecutors into realizing the great value of that testimony and they will begin worshiping him.

Examples of that happening are the prophets of the Old Testament. They were God’s humble witnesses in the years before the nation of Israel was destroyed and the people were carried away captive. Jeremiah wrote more about how he was persecuted than the others,

but they were all persecuted. For Stephen said to the Jews, **“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?”** (Acts 7:52). And those Jews were not able to answer him.

The prophet Jeremiah was hated, maligned, often arrested, and even cast into a deep, narrow, muddy well to die a slow death. Yet after Israel was destroyed, and the Jews returned from exile to restore their nation many years later, the words of Jeremiah were added to their holy scriptures. They were added because they were proven to be from God.

Another example can be seen in the apostles of Christ. Here is what Paul wrote 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).

Paul said they became as the trash of the world and an offscouring of all things. And yet, as with Jeremiah, their words became holy scripture, and even unbelievers now recognize them as great men.

Therefore dear brothers, as faithful disciples of Christ, we should persevere in our service to God, especially our witnessing to the world about him, even when we are severely persecuted. Because rejection and persecution always happen, especially to those who serve as God’s witnesses. Nevertheless, the final victory always belongs to God. And our labors will eventually bear much good fruit and light, and we will be respected even by sinners.

## The third woe comes quickly

- **The second woe departed. Behold, the third woe comes quickly** (Revelation 11:14).

Remember, the second woe seems to be about words, and how God curses men because (1) they use them for evil, and (2) they oppose words of truth about him and his will for us. Although the third woe is never named in the book, it is probably about how the devil and his disciples on the earth fight against God and his righteousness. For the word woe is used only once more in the book of Revelation, and that was after the devil was cast out of heaven to the earth. When that happened the book says, **“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 12:12).

Satan is truly a curse to mankind, because he is the great enemy of God and his righteousness. And he leads most of the world astray. His war against God on the earth is described in much of this last half of the book of Revelation.

## Final victory

- **And the seventh agent sounded, and great voices occurred in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign into the ages of the ages. And the twenty-four elders who sit before the throne of God, on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying,**
- **We thank thee, Lord God Almighty, who is and was, because thou have taken thy great power and reigned. And the nations were angry. And thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to thy bondmen the prophets, and to the sanctified, and to those who fear thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:15-18).**

Those words are obviously about the end of the world and the final judgment. Those closest to God in heaven rejoiced and praised him when he took his great power and reigned. God will reign into the ages of the ages, meaning forever. When the passage speaks of the kingdom of the world, that probably refers to all who ever lived upon the earth.

God will also judge the dead at that time, also meaning those who had lived upon the earth. As the author of Hebrew said, “... **it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, judgment ...**” (Hebrews 9:27). At that time God will give the reward

to his bondmen the prophets

to the sanctified

to those who fear his name, the small and the great

The prophets in the most general sense are all those who proclaim the word of God, whether divinely inspired or from the Holy Bible. The sanctified are all those who belong to Jesus Christ. And those who fear his name are all who believe and obey him.

God will also destroy those who destroy the earth. Sinners destroy the earth by polluting it with all their rebellious deeds. Notice how the passage speaks of the nations being angry. They were angry because they hate God and his ways. Therefore, his wrath came upon them.

Here is the first and last part of a parable Jesus told that mentions those who did not want him to reign over them “**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. ... Nevertheless those enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring here, and kill them before me**” (Luke 19:12-27).

## The temple of God in heaven

- **And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord was seen in his temple. And there occurred lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and great hail (Revelation 11:19).**

The covenant of the Lord, his new covenant brought to us by his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, is his promise that men on earth can become his sons for eternity if we will believe and obey that Son. And the temple in heaven, having been opened to reveal it, may symbolize, at the time of judgment, the recognition by all of mankind of the enormous beauty and value of that covenant. Remember, the new covenant of God is called the good news. And “good news” is truly a great understatement. It is the most fabulous news for all who love God and his righteousness, especially for the poor and lowly.

The lightnings, thunders, voices, and great hail may indicate expressions of God’s great power. That description may be a reminder of the mighty power he has to punish sinners.

And that seems to end this part of Revelation about the nature of our world, and about God’s reaction to rebellion against him here upon the earth.

## God’s Righteousness and the Devil

The next part of Revelation describes the great spiritual forces that are hostile to God; hostile to his righteousness, and hostile to his sons. It seems to be about the most powerful enemies of God: the devil and his organized allies. I speak about the devil’s allies in my comments about later passages in this book. I believe all those things are about Satan’s kingdom, which Jesus mentioned when some Jewish scholars accused him of casting out demons by the power of the devil.

Remember what Jesus replied to them: **“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 3:23-26). Although Satan is not divided against himself, his kingdom is a very loose one. I say more about that farther on.

Regarding their accusation that Jesus cast out demons by the power of the devil, Jesus’ opposition against Satan was total. He not only combated the demons, but he was against everything else about Satan’s evil influence and activities in the world. Jesus was completely opposed to Satan, as John said of him: **“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).

## God’s righteousness symbolized

- **And a great sign was seen in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head. And having in her womb, she cried out, suffering birth pains, and suffering to give birth** (Revelation 12:1-2).

The passage says, **“a great sign was seen in heaven”** about a woman. However, a later passage says she was on the earth. She is clearly not a creature. I believe she symbolizes a spirit that personifies God’s righteousness among men, both in heaven and on the earth. Solomon, in the first third of his book of Proverbs, personified wisdom as a noble woman, and he personified folly as an evil woman. In this section of John’s report, what he first saw was a woman who was clothed, supported, and crowned with brightness. God’s righ-

teousness is based upon truth and wisdom, which is brightness, and it contrasts with the darkness of sin in the world.

The word of God has always emphasized light and truth over darkness and deceit. Indeed, Jesus himself personified light, as John said about him in another book: **“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). And Paul said it was God **“Who rescued us out of the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love ...”** (Colossians 1:13).

John also said, **“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).

That woman was suffering birth pains. And those birth pains seem to symbolize the struggle and suffering necessary for God’s righteousness upon the earth to bear fruit. For a later text says that she had other offspring on the earth. The text also says later that she bore Jesus Christ. And it was God’s righteousness upon the earth that brought forth Jesus into the world.

It is only with struggle and suffering that any righteous soul upon the earth can bear fruit. Jesus was the sinless Son of God, yet it was even necessary for him to suffer. Remember what the author of Hebrews said about him: **“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 2:10). He suffered so that he could be fully perfected as our Redeemer.

Paul offered some encouraging words for us about our suffering, so be not disheartened when you must suffer for living righteously. Here is what he wrote to the Corinthians: **“Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our affliction, in order for us to be able to encourage those in every affliction, through the encouragement of which we ourselves are encouraged by God. Because, as the sufferings of the Christ abound to us, so also our encouragement abounds through the Christ.**

**“But whether we are oppressed, it is for your encouragement and salvation, which works by endurance from the same sufferings that we also experience (and our hope for you is steadfast), or we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement and salvation, knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement”** (Second Corinthians 1:3-7).

And remember, he also wrote in his letter to the Romans of the great reward God has for us who endure suffering for his righteousness: **“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).

## The fiery red dragon

- **And another sign was seen in heaven. And behold, a great fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads (Revelation 12:3).**

That great fiery red dragon is later identified as the devil. The description of him is, of course, figurative. Horns symbolize power; heads symbolize things like mentality and leadership; and diadems symbolize authority. Since the dragon is described as a predatory beast that has seven heads, that suggests he is an evil creature that has a very divided mentality, a mentality that leads about and seeks to satisfy his one monstrous body.

Having ten horns and seven heads suggest he not only has a divided mentality but he has more power than intelligence. Having diadems on his heads indicates he has great authority. And that each of his heads has a diadem seems to indicate that he retains his authority even though he has a divided mentality.

Having a divided mentality means he is completely unstable in his thinking and behavior. For when James was speaking about how to ask God for wisdom, he 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).

James said a double-minded man was unstable in all his ways. The devil is more than double-minded. His mentality is multiple-minded to the fullest extent (the symbolic seven), which means he is completely unstable, unreliable, and untrustworthy. Those seven heads may also symbolize his desperation to think of ways to defeat God so that he can seize complete supremacy.

The devil has a divided mentality. He is only united in his evil feelings, lusts, and desires, and in his opposition to God—he has one monstrous body. Remember, he is the ruler of this world, and the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. That may be another reason why there is so much division in the world. Although the devil is the ruler of this world, he is incapable of uniting men together to do anything except to oppose the righteousness of God, because he himself has such a divided mentality. Indeed, the world loves divisions among them, which they glorify as “tolerance” and “diversity.”

Therefore, Satan’s kingdom is very loosely united. It seems to be like this description of a nation that was prophesied in the book of Daniel: **“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”** (Daniel 2:40-43).

Bible commentators generally agree that prophecy describes the Roman empire, which was a loose federation of countries. It was “a divided kingdom” in the sense that it was composed of different countries with different languages and cultures. Nevertheless, they were all united in the one empire, which was held together with the strength of iron (brute force). And that seems to be the kind of kingdom Satan has.

### The dragon takes the third part with him

- **And his tail drags the third part of the stars of the heaven, and cast them to the earth** (Revelation 12:4).

The third part of the stars that the dragon cast upon the earth no doubt symbolizes the spiritual allies he had in heaven, which are now the demons of the world. Such spiritual creatures prefer to be in the world where they can live independent of God’s will. They must have been spirits of God’s offspring in heaven who joined the devil in opposition to him, because they have knowledge of good and evil, and the power of free will. And by Satan’s influence those of them who were still in heaven fought with him when he was being cast out from there. Remember what the demons said to Jesus: **“What is with us and thee, Jesus, Son of God? Did thou come here before the time to torment us?”** (Matthew 8:29). God is allowing them to live and roam upon the earth before the time of the final judgment.

### Christ and the devil

- **And the dragon stood before the woman who was going to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And she gave birth to a son, 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** (Revelation 12:4-5).

The child that the woman delivered was Jesus Christ. The woman symbolizes God’s righteousness among men, and it was through God’s righteousness that Jesus, being both the Son of God and the son of man, became our Savior. The devil wanted to destroy him because Jesus’ life of perfect obedience as the son of man would defeat the devil’s arguments to justify sin. Remember, Paul said that **“God, having sent his own Son in a form of flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh ...”** (Romans 8:3). In spite of all the devil’s efforts against him Jesus remained sinless. He lived in perfect obedience to God in this dark world filled with trials and temptations—he alone of all of the children of God.

Jesus’ sinless life of obedience caused the condemnation of the devil, which meant the devil could no longer be in heaven. For Jesus told his apostles just before his betrayal and crucifixion, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 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 12:31-33). Jesus would draw all men to him by offering them redemption from their sins. For he earned that right by suffering in completely faithful obedience to the Father even to the point of crucifixion (lifted up).

His sinless life of obedience to God brought glory both to himself and to the Father. For he proved their complete superiority. As he said to his apostles, just before his crucifixion, **“Now the Son of man is glorified, and God is glorified in him”** (John 13:31). Therefore, God has raised him up to his throne, where he will reign over all the nations with an iron rod, which means with strict control.

The nations in the passage in Revelation refer to all men who have not been redeemed by Jesus, because they refused to repent and submit to him. Consequently, when this sinful world is destroyed, those men will be bound and cast into the lake of fire with the devil and the demons. In that place those unrepentant sinners will no longer have the ability to rebel, for they will be under absolute control; they will be ruled with an iron rod—with hard and unbreakable force.

### A place prepared for the woman

- **And the woman 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** (Revelation 12:6).

The text says the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place there prepared by God so she could be nourished for three and a half years (a half cycle of time). The wilderness probably symbolizes the humble and lowly souls of the earth, where God’s righteousness is nourished and preserved for a period of time. Remember, that was the same length of time that the two witnesses of God testified about him before they were slain.

Men who are faithful disciples of Christ are humble and lowly, for Jesus said to God, **“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).

Their lives are like a wilderness because they lose their lives to save them. Remember what Jesus said about that: **“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). Yet they preserve righteousness upon the earth.

### War in 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** (Revelation 12:7-9).

After Jesus ascended to God’s throne the devil was condemned to be cast out of heaven. When Adam and Eve sinned they were sent out of the garden of Eden, and they departed passively. The devil was cast out of heaven because all of his arguments for sin were defeated by the Son of God. However, the devil did not leave without a fight. Like every wicked man he demands justice for himself and his allies, but he will not accept justice against himself.

The devil lost his war in heaven and he was cast out. However, he still leads the whole world astray. He uses temptations and deceit to lead men astray. For he is the great invisible spirit that manipulates men who take him into their hearts. And once he is accepted into the heart of a man, he keeps him deceived about the truth, and keeps him disobedient to God. And that is the case with most men of the world.

That is taught in this passage Paul wrote, which was about the Jews who would not accept Jesus: **“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). Their refusal to believe keeps them blinded to the truth about Jesus and his good news. The veil upon their heart prevents them from recognizing how the message of the good news of Christ was sent by God, and is far superior to the law of Moses, which it supersedes. You can read more about that in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

## Rejoicing for the victory of Christ

- **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).

While the devil was in heaven he continually accused the faithful offspring of God in the world because of our inability to live without sin. He can no longer do that before God, because Jesus' perfect sacrifice earned him the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. That brought us salvation, and made us righteous before God. It also brought us spiritual power over our enemies and established his church, the kingdom of God on the earth for us. And it proved the moral and spiritual superiority of Christ, which verified indisputably his right to have authority over all things. Jesus was Jehovah of the Old Testament, and he had been continually challenged by the devil in heaven. Christ defeated those challenges, but God continues to be challenged on the earth by sinful men.

The devil can no longer accuse us in heaven, but he uses his allies on the earth to continually accuse us and condemn us here. That helps keep sinful men blinded to the truth. His allies look for every fault they can find in our lives to accuse us, especially when we oppose them. And if they cannot find any against us, they invent some and accuse us falsely. That is a major way the devil and his allies fight against us. Remember, “false accuser” is the literal meaning of the Greek word for devil.

## Overcoming our accuser

- **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 12:11).

We overcome the devil by Jesus' power to redeem us, and by our acceptance of the word of his good news, which his apostles first testified and we continue to proclaim. For neither the devil nor anybody else can now justifiably accuse before God those who belong to 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).

Jesus’ death upon the cross culminated his life of perfect self-sacrifice. Therefore, he won the right to redeem from condemnation all who belong to him. For he paid all our debts to God caused by our sins. Therefore, we can no longer be condemned to hell with the devil and the demons. We cannot be condemned as long as we continue to be faithful and obedient to Christ, remaining in the kingdom of God, and are willing to sacrifice our lives for God as Jesus did his life upon the earth.

Most of us sacrifice our lives for him in a figurative way, by giving up our selfishness, and instead living righteously in obedience to the will of God. Remember, 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. 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 16:24-26).

## Woe to the world

- **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 12:12).

That passage says woe to the world because the devil has come down to us. His presence is a curse to us because he is the great enemy of God and all who belong to him. And he is powerful and cunning enough to lead the world astray so they will join him in his opposition to God, which causes God to send curses upon the earth because of that opposition. Therefore, the devil is a curse to all of mankind, whether they join him or not. If men join him, then they will be cursed and condemned with him. And if men do not join him, then he and his allies persecute them. Therefore, woe to us on the earth. The devil is a curse to men either way.

The Bible indicates that the devil was a thorn in the side of all the righteous souls in heaven before Christ’s great victory over him. Remember how the devil confronted and disputed with Jehovah about the righteous man Job. The devil challenged Jehovah’s assessment of Job and implied he was wiser than Jehovah. Jehovah called Job a perfect and upright man. But the devil said in effect that Jehovah was wrong, and if Job were tested that would prove Jehovah was wrong.

Another example is when Satan provoked Jehovah against Israel. Apparently the people were sinning, and Satan demanded they be punished. For the record says, **“And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel”** (First Chronicles 21:1), and, **“And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, saying, Go, number Israel and Judah”** (Second Samuel 24:1).

What those passages say is that Satan accused the people of being guilty, thus provoking the anger of Jehovah against them. And to test them, David was moved to number the people. That would test them because the law of Moses said, **“When thou take the sum of the sons of Israel, according to those who are numbered of them, then they shall give**

**every man a ransom for his soul to Jehovah when thou number them, that there be no plague among them when thou number them”** (Exodus 30:12).

After David took the census, the people failed to pay the required ransom. Hence, the people suffered the punishment of a pestilence that took the lives of 70,000 men in Israel. You can read the details of that story in Second Samuel 24 and First Chronicles 21.

Those examples were no doubt a tiny sample of the continual challenges and accusations the devil made to God against us. But the victory of the Lamb, Jesus’ sinless life of obedience to God, brought us salvation, justified his power, established God’s kingdom (the church, composed of his sons for eternity), and won him the ultimate authority. It defeated all of the devil’s arguments. The citizens of heaven knew those things, which is no doubt why they rejoiced. The devil is full of wrath because he was defeated by Christ (justly), and he lost his right to be in heaven.

There is a very popular myth that says hell is the devil’s domain. That myth is even perpetrated by some men who call themselves Christians. Hell is definitely *not* the devil’s domain nor will it ever be. When he is finally cast into hell he will be in bondage there, and ruled with an iron rod like every other soul there. He will have no freedom or authority, and he will suffer the fires of hell like every other sinner.

The devil’s domain is not hell, but the world, where he roams about leading men astray and seeking to destroy those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. Remember what Jesus said to the congregation at Pergamos: **“I know thy works, and where thou dwell, where Satan’s throne is”** (Revelation 2:13). Satan’s throne was not in the city of Pergamos. His throne and his kingdom are in this world (where we all dwell), which is why it is so filled with sin and wickedness.

Satan is the invisible spirit that works in the sons of disobedience, and who is the ruler of this world. And the more I have learned from the Bible, the more I can see his evil spirit continually at work using sinful men to undermine faith in God and his righteousness. Regarding that myth about him, no doubt the devil helps perpetrate it, because it keeps men from knowing the truth about how he actually operates.

Perhaps what is meant by the devil having little time is that he has little time before he is bound and cast into the abyss, which is describe farther in this book. It may also mean he has little time before being cast into the lake of fire to remain forever, even though it may be thousands of years from now. For remember, **“... one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”** (Second Peter 3:8).

## Persecuting the righteous

- **And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male. And two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly into the wilderness to her place. So that she might be nourished there for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.**
- **And the serpent cast water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might make her carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the**

**dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was angry toward the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, those keeping the commandments of God, and having the testimony of Jesus** (Revelation 12:13-17).

As I suggested earlier, the wilderness mentioned in the above passage in Revelation probably symbolizes the hearts of righteous souls, faithful men who are humble and lowly. The **“time, and times, and half a time”** no doubt means three and a half, which is half of seven. Hence a half cycle of time. The river from the mouth of Satan may symbolize the lies used by his disciples in an effort to overwhelm obedience to the righteousness of God.

Remember, two of the main methods of our enemies are to continually pour out lies against God’s righteousness, and to make false accusations against all who are striving to become his sons for eternity. Yet God causes some kinds of forces of the earth (both human and nonhuman) to create circumstances that prevent those lies and false accusations from destroying his righteousness. That may be the meaning of the earth opening its mouth.

It is very common for unbelievers to condemn those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. Peter spoke of that when he said, **“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your behavior good among the Gentiles, so that, upon which they speak against you as evildoers, they may glorify God in the day of visitation, from having observed your good works”** (First Peter 2:11-12). Sinful men are deceived by the devil here upon the earth so as to speak against us as evildoers. But in heaven they will learn the truth of our good works, and then they will glorify God.

Nevertheless, whatever those things in Revelation mean, the devil continues to try to destroy those who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. He wants to destroy us because we are allied with God in his war against sin.

Perhaps another reason he wants to destroy us is because God may have a quota of souls that he wants to become his sons before he ends the world. God may want a certain number of his offspring to be his sons for eternity, and he does not choose who they will be until they are tested by living in this world. Whether that is true or not, if Satan believes it then he may think the more souls he can turn away from God the longer he can roam the earth and escape the lake of fire. And that may be another reason why he is such a vicious enemy of all who are righteous.

Nevertheless, regardless of how strong an enemy he becomes to us, consider these encouraging words of John: **“... greater is he in you than he in the world”** (First John 4:4). And also consider these words of Paul: **“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).

## Satan’s kingdom

The previous material in Revelation was about the devil, that great fiery red dragon who was cast out of heaven after Jesus ascended victoriously to God’s throne. The material in

the next part seems to be about Satan's kingdom on the earth. Nevertheless, his kingdom existed here long before he was cast out of heaven. Remember how Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom when the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub the ruler of the demons (see Matthew 12:25-26).

John told how we can identify followers of the devil, when he said, **“By this the children of God are visible, and the children of the devil. Every man not doing righteousness is not of God, and he who is not loving his brother”** (First John 3:10). Every man not doing righteousness and not loving his brother (meaning other righteous men) is a child of the devil and part of his kingdom. God's kingdom on the earth consists of men who are doing righteousness and loving their brothers. And they are God's children. And every man in the world belongs in one or the other of those spiritual kingdoms.

### The world-rulers of the darkness

- **And I stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea having ten horns, and seven heads, and ten diadems upon its horns, and upon its heads names of blasphemy. And the beast that I saw was similar to a leopard. And its feet were like a bear, and its mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave to it his power, and his throne, and great authority. And one of its heads was as in death, having been killed. And its deadly wound was healed.**
- **And the whole earth marveled behind the beast. And they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who is able to war against it? And a mouth was given to it speaking great things and blasphemy. And authority was given it to make war forty-two months. And it opened its mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given it to make war with the sanctified, and to overcome them.**
- **And authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to it. And all who dwell upon the earth will worship it, whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who was killed from the foundation of the world** (Revelation 13:1-8).

Jesus was the Lamb who was killed from the foundation of the world. He was killed in the sense of being destined from the beginning to be killed for our salvation. He is our sacrificial “passover lamb” (see First Corinthians 5:7).

Regarding the beast, there has never been such a physical creature upon the earth nor will there be. That description symbolizes a spiritual “beast” that is a type of evil spirit or way of thinking in the minds of certain sinful men. It is a single beast because it is a common spirit that is in their minds, a way of thinking that is like that of the devil. Remember, thoughts in our minds are a type of spirit.

That beast is manifested collectively by many different men, because it is a common spirit within them. Men who have that spirit within them live and die, but that spirit endures in the minds of men who replace them. The spirit of a nation continues to exist even though

its citizens are continually being replaced as they are born, live, and then die. Likewise that evil beast.

That beast seems to be the one the book previously said ascended out of the abyss. John said in the above passage he saw the beast rising out of the sea. Now remember, in other passages of the Bible the sea sometimes symbolizes populations of mankind. And at another place in the book of Revelation water is used to symbolize those populations: **“The waters that thou saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues”** (Revelation 17:15). Therefore, the sea from which the beast arose must symbolize the population of the world.

I said previously that the pit of the abyss was a prison for evil spirits. Perhaps the abyss can also refer to the minds of men who harbor evil thoughts within their hearts, which is another pit of evil spirits. That would mean this beast was a product of evil thoughts and ideas (a type of evil spirits) that develop in the minds of sinful men. Consider this proverb: **“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 26:24-25). Evil men are full of abominations in their hearts.

That beast arose out of the sea (see 13:1), meaning from the population of the world. And it ascended from the abyss (see 11:7), meaning it is composed of evil spirits, which in this case I believe are evil thoughts in the hearts of men. It was described as being generally similar to the dragon, which means it is a satanic spirit. It was more specifically described in symbolic terms as being aggressive, predatory, and stealthy. It was also said to be boastful and blasphemous. And it was described as having **“authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation ... .”**

There is only one mighty power among men throughout the world that has such authority and force, and that is the governments of nations. Remember, horns symbolize power; heads symbolize things like mentality and leadership; and diadems symbolize authority. Its seven heads may symbolize the rulers of world governments, for remember the number seven symbolizes completeness. And its horns and diadems symbolize their power and authority. Having ten diadems on its horns may symbolize authority based upon force, which is true of all governments. If you doubt that, try opposing them with force. And like the devil, having more horns than heads suggests that beast has more power than intelligence, which is also true of world governments.

Moreover, world governments cannot be eliminated. A particular regime may be destroyed, but as long as a nation exists it will have a government. The head with the deadly wound that was healed may symbolize that fact. The wound symbolizes the destruction of a nation’s government controlled by a particular regime. Yet for that nation a government of one kind or another always survives, being ruled by somebody else.

Regarding world governments, remember what Paul said: **“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 6:11-12).

As children of God, ours is a spiritual warfare, a warfare that is now centered in the world. It involves a conflict between spiritual powers: the power of God versus the power the

devil, each joined by their respective allies. And since the devil is now the ruler of this world, then his allies occupy most of the principle offices and positions of authority. They are **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age,”** which are the dominant rulers of the governments of this world. And remember, the **“spiritual things of wickedness in the heavenly things”** probably refer to the devil and the demons that roam the earth.

Regarding the relationship of world governments to the devil, remember one of the things the devil said to Jesus when he was tempting him in the wilderness: **“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 will worship before me, it will all be thine”** (Luke 4:7). The great majority of men have always been allied with the devil.

Jehovah gave the world to mankind, but men have given themselves to the devil. For remember, Paul said the devil is the **“spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). And Jesus called him the ruler of this world at the last supper. Jesus was going to be betrayed which would result in his crucifixion. And when Jesus ascended back to heaven, the devil was going to be cast out from there. Therefore he said, **“Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”** (John 12:31).

Satan, the fiery red dragon, was cast out of heaven after Jesus was raised from the earth to the throne of God. Satan was cast out of heaven because the sinless and sacrificial life of Jesus defeated all of the devil’s arguments in his opposition to God. Therefore, the devil was found unworthy of living in heaven. Remember, God is tolerating him on the earth because he is still developing sons for eternity, and they need to suffer for righteousness as Jesus did so they can prove their worthiness.

The passage in Revelation said about the beast, **“And the dragon gave to it his power, and his throne, and great authority.”** That power and authority is over the sons of disobedience, because he is the ruler of this world. And the populations of the world are ruled by their governments. And since the governments of the world belong to the devil, that is more evidence that the beast must symbolize those governments, **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age.”**

Those world-rulers of the darkness, those who serve the devil, claim supremacy even over God and all religions, and they require all men to serve and venerate them as supreme. How subtle or blatant they are about it depends upon how much power they gain over their populations. Nevertheless, they all claim ultimate authority, and they use the power of their “horns” to enforce it.

History shows that world governments have always been more or less disobedient to God, except for a few brief times in the tiny country of ancient Israel. Although the word of God says that Jesus is **“Lord of lords and King of kings”** (Revelation 17:14), yet no government has ever recognized him that way. Governments ruled by Catholicism do not serve God, because the Catholic hierarchy and their traditions are nothing like the true church. And Islam is a completely false religion. The deity of Muslims is Allah, who is absolutely *not* God. Never insult God by associating his name in any way with that evil and ruthless religion, which is what servants of the devil are doing.

Even the founders of our American government (when most of whose citizens believed in Christ) excluded God from involvement in government, except to occasionally honor him with their lips. But remember what Jesus said about being neutral toward him: **“He who is not with me is against me ...”** (Matthew 12:30). When our national forefathers excluded the King of kings from involvement in our government, that made them against him. Although I am sure most of them did not realize it.

Now what are Christians to do, for the word of God has commanded us to obey our governments? As Peter said, **“Therefore because of the Lord, ye should submit to every human establishment, whether to a king as being supreme, or to governors as being sent by him for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers”** (First Peter 2:13-14). And Paul said, **“I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men, for kings and all those who are in prominence, so that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and propriety. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of truth”** (First Timothy 2:1-4).

Paul even said they were helpers of God to punish evil men: **“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. 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 13:3-7).

Since those things were commanded, how could that beast symbolize world governments? It could symbolize a certain kind of spirit within governments. The Bible teaches that we are to submit to them when they serve God by promoting law and order, and by opposing evil men, but not when they act against God. For both Peter and Paul often disobeyed governors and other men in offices of authority when those rulers were opposing God and his righteousness.

Notice what Paul said about them: **“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.”** That means offices of authority or their office holders are not legitimate in God’s sight if they are **“not by God,”** meaning they do not act as a **“helper of God” “for vengeance of evildoers and praise of well-doers.”** And we can conclude from what the early disciples did that whenever any office holder commands us to violate the will of God, then we also must disobey him. For Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thus it seems, every government is influenced by two spirits. First, God influences the rulers of our governments to be his servants by promoting righteousness and opposing

evil. Consider these instructions Jesus gave to his disciples about obeying the rulers of the government in Israel: **“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).

The scholars and Pharisees were hypocrites who did evil, but they still promoted the laws of Moses for the population: they sat **“on Moses seat.”** Indeed, no nation could survive if their rulers did not promote some righteousness.

Second, since God has allowed all the kingdoms of the world to belong to the devil, then the devil’s spirit controls them. And I believe that satanic beast described in Revelation symbolizes the human manifestation of the spirit of the devil that controls world governments.

Thus, there are two spirits at work in the governments of the world. The Spirit of God influences them to promote deeds of righteousness and oppose evil ones, which helps maintain law and order in their countries. In contrast the spirit of the devil influences them to be aggressive, predatory, stealthy, boastful, and blasphemous. That satanic spirit causes them to resist honoring Christ as their Lord and King, and it leads them to persecute the faithful of God. It is just another part of the continuing war between God and the devil.

It should be noted, however, that the evil spirit of a government is not always dominant enough to persecute us fully. Therefore, such hostility to the sanctified of God can cycle from very mild to very severe. That is what is happening in the United States of America. The spirit of that satanic beast has increased greatly in my country in the last half-century. Consequently, hostility toward Christians, including persecution against them by our government is increasing in this land, which was formerly populated mostly by those who believe in Christ. In this book of Revelation God is warning us to expect things like that to happen.

### Perseverance of the sanctified

- **If any man has an ear, let him hear. If any man keeps in captivity, he goes. If any man kills with a sword, he must be killed with a sword. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the sanctified** (Revelation 13:9-10).

Those are more words of warning about sin, and encouragement for faithfulness to God. Those words about keeping in captivity and about killing are examples of justice applied. For every brutal act will be recompensed appropriately. He who is brutal toward the innocent will be treated brutally. That recompense may not happen in this life, but it will surely happen in the afterlife, because God guarantees justice will be done.

### False religions and evil ideologies

- **And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and it had two horns similar to a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. And it exercises all the authority of the first beast before it. And it made the earth and those who dwell in it so that they would worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. And it does great signs, so that even fire would come down out of the sky upon the earth in the sight of men.**

- **And it leads my kind astray (those dwelling on the earth) because of the signs that were given it to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast that had the sword-wound and lived. And it was given it to give a spirit to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak, and would make as many as would not ever worship the image of the beast be killed.**
- **And it makes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen and the bondmen, that they would give them marks on their right hand, or on their foreheads. And so that not any man can buy or sell unless having the mark—the name of the beast or the number of its name. Here is wisdom: He who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a number of a man. And its number is 666 (Revelation 13:11-18).**

That beast was later called the false prophet (see 16:13). John gave no description of its appearance, except to say it had two horns similar to a lamb. What John describes is how it behaves. Since it was called the false prophet, it must symbolize erroneous beliefs about God and how he wants us to live in the world. That means it is about false religions and evil ideologies.

The description of that second beast seems to say we should expect to see such beliefs arise that superficially appear to be gentle and harmless (like a lamb), but they speak like the devil and are a part of his kingdom. Such beliefs support and promote the spirit of governments that is hostile to God and his righteousness.

The passage says that men who champion those false beliefs will use powerful methods of persuasion to lead populations astray and cause them to submit to and serve the satanic parts of their governments. As Jesus prophesied, there will be many false prophets who will use such devices: **“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”** (Matthew 24:24).

Such men will rely heavily upon deceit, because the spirit of the devil guides them. For remember, Jesus said deceit is a natural part of the devil: **“... 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). And when Paul was defending himself against false teachers in the church, he said about them, **“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”** (Second Corinthians 11:13-14).

Remember however, none of the great signs that unrighteous men use are supernatural, for only God has that power, and he no longer gives it to men. Moreover, he never gave it to a sinner. Some of those deceivers may rely upon superstition and coincidental effects to give the impression they have divine powers. Some of them may also utilize clever magical tricks and ingenious devices, as well as knowledge of natural laws to create **“great signs and wonders”** to lead men astray.

Notice also the text says the second beast told men to make an image of the first beast. Since I believe the first beast symbolizes the satanic part of world governments, then it

must be some kind of image of that. Perhaps the image symbolizes an idealized description of that part of government, which description is then promoted and worshiped. And perhaps that idealized description eventually becomes so deeply ingrained in the hearts of the people that it becomes a motivating spirit within them.

Perhaps an example of such an “image” is the modern doctrine of communism. Communism is a type of image, an abstract image that is an idealistic form of government. One that is hostile to God, and is composed of **“world-rulers of the darkness of this age.”** Supporters of communism worship that idealistic form of government.

Another example that few Americans realize is the American Constitution, the laws of which are now worshiped and interpreted to combat God and his will for us. They are now being used to support all manner of wrongs they call “rights,” and to take away our God-given rights to perform righteousness.

Our constitution has become an idol. For all of our rulers are required to bow down and do homage to that human document instead of the sacred document of the word of God. Humanism is the evil ideology that has promoted the worship of that human document, which document is an example of the “image” of the beast; the beast that is composed of men who control the governments of the world to oppose the reign of Christ and his righteousness.

Evil ideologies and false religions also make all men become aligned with the part of their government that is hostile to God, and they create situations that require all men to support it. The passage said that beast **“exercises all the authority of the first beast before it.”** That authority is not based upon legal requirements of governments. It is based upon the spiritual authority the devil has over the sons of disobedience.

Such ideologies and false religions lead to physical and economic persecution against the sanctified of God. Rules, regulations, and socio-economic conventions are promoted so as to isolate and brand as unfit all who will not cooperate with those parts of governments that are hostile to God and his righteousness.

For example, our public schools take the children of the country and subtly turn their hearts away from God. Regulations have been created so that no text book is allowed to be used if it honors God as Creator of the world; no teacher is allowed employment unless he teaches that all organisms evolved naturally during a period of millions of years; and no Bible is allowed on the property nor can the name of God even be mentioned, unless it is taken in vain as an expletive (violating the third of the ten commandments). The colleges and universities are even more blatant in their hostility toward him.

Consider also the issues of abortion and homosexuality. We who oppose those evil things are called extremists and phobic (phobias are mental disorders). They have encouraged the creation of legislation such as the ones they call “anti-discrimination” and “hate-crime” laws, which are being used to persecute us. Those laws are designed to criminalise our opposition to their evil, which opposition they demonize as “discrimination” and “hate.”

Those hypocrites themselves constantly discriminate against us, and they are filled with hatred of our righteousness. Yet they condemn as evil our opposition and hatred of their wickedness. Nevertheless, they are bringing the wrath of God against them, because the prophet Isaiah said, **“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!”** (Isaiah 5:20).

The meaning of the number of the beast (666) is very mysterious. But perhaps that number symbolizes great power and wealth, because that was the number of talents of gold that came to king Solomon each year (see First Kings 10:14). And there is nothing that has more power and wealth than world governments. It also may symbolize a system that is flawed: not reaching a perfect seven (only six) or a full half of it (only three).

Dear reader, if you want to know why there is so much opposition to Christ and the Bible by world governments, the book of Revelation tells you. If you are puzzled why there is now so much government support in America for false religions such as Islam and Buddhism, but hostility toward Christ and the Bible, the book of Revelation tells you. There are powerful spiritual forces at war in this world, powers for the devil against powers for God. On the side of the devil is the satanic spiritual beast that rules the nations of the world. And that beast is supported by another spiritual beast that helps the devil lead the hearts of men astray.

But remember, those spiritual forces operate through particular men. And those men can be identified by their works. Therefore, by their actions we can identify the men who are a part of those evil beasts. And being able to identify such men will greatly increase your understanding about the world they control. For they serve the devil, who seeks to destroy men who are striving to become sons of God for eternity. Indeed, since the devil is the spirit that rules this world, I have no doubt that all children of God upon the earth would be totally destroyed if it were not for the intervening support of God. He continually protects each one of us who belong to him.

Remember these encouraging words of Paul: **“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. 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 8:35-39).

Therefore, be like Paul and fight the good fight, serving God patiently, and wait for the victory he will bring. Also remember these words of the psalm: **“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”** (Psalm 2:1-5).

As the psalm says, the nations of the world become violent and set their thoughts on unrighteous things. And their rulers join together to rebel against God and his Son, Jesus Christ, whom they accuse as oppressing them by using “bonds” and “cords” to keep them from their freedom—freedom to indulge their sinful lusts. Nevertheless, the Lord is so

much superior that he will deride them, and will respond with his wrath and great displeasure—but in his own good time and way.

The statement that he will laugh, no doubt symbolizes his judgment of how ridiculous such puny creatures are to oppose him. Here are two other Psalms about God laughing at the wicked: **“The wicked man plots against the righteous man, and gnashes upon him with his teeth. The Lord will laugh at him, for he sees that his day is coming”** (Psalm 37:12-13), and, **“Even thou, O Jehovah God of hosts, the God of Israel, arise to visit all the nations. Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. ... They return at evening. They howl like a dog, and go round about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth. Swords are in their lips, for *they say*, Who hears? But thou, O Jehovah, will laugh at them. Thou will have all the nations in derision”** (Psalm 59:5-8).

This next part of Revelation is about harvesting souls for God.

### A first fruit of souls for God

- **And I looked, and lo, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with it a number, a hundred and forty-four thousand, having its name and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven as a sound of many waters, and as a sound of great thunder.**
- **“And the voice that I heard was as of harpers harping with their harps. And they sing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders. And none could learn the song except the hundred and forty-four thousand, those who have been redeemed from the earth.**
- **These are men [generically speaking] who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased by Jesus, out of men, a first fruit to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth, for they are unblemished** (Revelation 14:1-5).

John told earlier about a hundred and forty-four thousand of the sons of Israel upon the earth who received the seal of God upon their foreheads. The hundred and forty-four thousand in the above passage were in heaven. That passage says those men were purchased by Jesus out of men. Every faithful disciple of Christ has been purchased by Jesus out of men. And the book of Revelation said earlier that the chosen of God would be **“a great multitude, which none could number, out of every nation, and tribes and peoples and tongues ...”** (7:9).

Therefore, the hundred and forty-four thousand who were singing before the throne probably symbolize those men (and women) who were a select group of God’s faithful disciples that were chosen to be brought to heaven before the end of the world, **“a first fruit”** of those who are becoming God’s sons for eternity. And it should certainly not be interpreted to mean there will only be a hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed souls in heaven. They were a first fruit, and not the whole harvest.

Mount Zion in Israel was where the temple of God was built. Therefore, mount Zion in the above description must symbolize the location of the temple of God in heaven. The men being virgins is no doubt figurative, meaning they had been purified by the blood of the

Lamb, and did not defile themselves by continuing to indulge in sinful pleasure. Sinful pleasure is symbolized in Revelation as an evil and lascivious woman (see Revelation 17).

Even though we have all been defiled by our sinful pleasures, we become spiritual virgins when we accept Jesus Christ. As 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).

We are a new creation, an undefiled creation in spirit. Therefore, we are all virgins in spirit. For remember what Paul said about us, **“For I am jealous for you with a jealousy of God. For I betrothed you to one husband, a pure virgin to present to the Christ”** (Second Corinthians 11:2). Therefore, in that sense we are all pure virgins, having been begotten from above, begotten from the Spirit (see John 3:7-8).

### Words of encouragement and warning

- **And I saw an agent flying in mid-heaven having eternal good news to proclaim to those who sit on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying in a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. And worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and springs of waters** (Revelation 14:6-7).

The agent flying in mid-heaven speaking in a great voice may symbolize a time when the good news of Christ is proclaimed throughout the world with great power and vividness. The good news of Christ contains words of encouragement for all mankind to fear God and worship him.

The hour of God’s judgment probably symbolizes whenever the good new of Christ is proclaimed to the world, and not the final judgment at the end of the world. The hour in that passage probably symbolizes our lives in this world where we can qualify to become sons of God for eternity. For our short lives in this world are but an hour relative to eternity. And it is only during that short hour that we have the opportunity to show our worthiness to become sons of God for eternity. For how we live in that “hour” will determine how God will judge us.

### Babylon the great has fallen

- **And another, a second agent, followed, saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen. She has given all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication** (Revelation 14:8).

The Babylon of that passage symbolizes the commerce of illicit pleasure, which has intoxicated all the nations causing them to deserve God’s wrath. Like the two beasts described earlier it is not a unique one of a kind creature. It is the spirit that energizes that activity whenever and wherever it develops. Much more is said about that evil business in the chapter after the next one.

## Punishment for those who worship the beast

- **And another agent, a third, followed them, saying in a great voice, If any man worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also himself will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which was mixed undiluted in the cup of his anger. And he will be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy agents and before the Lamb.**
- **And the smoke of their torment ascends into the ages of ages. And they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and its image, and if any man receives the mark of its name** (Revelation 14:9-11).

Those are words of stern warning against worshiping that representative of the devil and becoming a part of it. For every man who does, and who continues to do so has already been judged to receive eternal torment with fire and brimstone, which refers to the lake of fire called hell. For that beast is like the devil incarnate. Indeed, those who have the eyes of their minds open can actually see the devil manifested in the world that way.

I formerly wondered what the devil was like in the world, but the word of God has opened my eyes so that I no longer wonder. I can see him everywhere being manifested in the bodies of evil men. As we are the body of Christ in the world (see Ephesians 5:30), because his Spirit works within us, so evil men are the body of Satan in the world, because his spirit works within them (see Ephesians 2:2).

There are many ways to see and understand the world. And many of those ways are very erroneous. Those ways include false religions and other false beliefs such as Darwinism. Paranoia is a pathological and irrational way of seeing reality. Men who are paranoid are fools, and how they live proves it. Believers in God and his Bible are wise men, and the fruits of their lives proves it. For there is no more rational way of seeing reality than through the lens of the Bible. Therefore, let not scoffers lead you astray and discourage you from seeing the truth about God and about the devil.

## Encouragement for our perseverance

- **Here is the perseverance of the sanctified. Here are those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. 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 14:12-13).

Those are more words of encouragement for those who are obedient to God. Our works follow us because at the last day we will all be judged by our works (see 20:12-13). Also remember what Jesus said about 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).

Our works following us may also refer to the improved character of our eternal spirits, which every disciple of Christ is expected to develop as we live in this world. For our personal spirit is our eternal existence.

## The final harvest

- **And I looked, and behold, a white cloud. And sitting upon the cloud, like a son of man, having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another agent came out from the temple, crying out in a great voice to him who sits on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle and reap, because the hour has come to reap, because the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he who sits on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped** (Revelation 14:14-16).

That passage no doubt means an agent was sent from God commanding Jesus, his only begotten Son (him sitting upon the cloud), to commence the process of reaping the ripe harvest, meaning to gather together his sanctified souls to bring up to heaven. Jesus is always obedient to the Father. For when he told his apostles he was going to submit to crucifixion, as God commanded him, he said, **“And as the Father commanded me, thus I do”** (John 14:31).

Those words of that passage in Revelation may symbolize part of what will happen at the end of the world. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples about the end: **“But straight-away 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.**

**“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 24:29-31).

Jesus himself is coming in the clouds of the sky with his mighty agents to gather together from throughout the world those who are chosen to be sons of God for eternity. The sickle mentioned in the above passage in Revelation probably symbolizes the agents he will send forth.

## The grapes of God’s wrath

- **And another agent came out from the temple in heaven, also himself having a sharp sickle. And another agent came out from the altar having power over the fire. And he cried out in a great shout to him who has the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the grapevine of the earth, because its grapes are fully ripe.**
- **And the agent sent his sickle to the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out from the wine-**

**press, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs** (Revelation 14:17-20).

Another agent from the temple in heaven was sent to command another agent to begin the process of gathering the sinners of the world at a time of great destruction. Jesus gathered his sanctified for salvation, an agent from heaven gathered sinners for punishment.

That description of the judgment of sinners is vivid and gruesome. It was given that way no doubt to help alarm and warn men (those who will listen) to repent of their sins and become faithful disciples of Christ. Otherwise they will suffer something far more horrible in the lake of fire that burns forever.

## The seven last plagues

- **And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven agents having seven plagues, the last, because in them the wrath of God is ended** (Revelation 15:1).

That passage seems to anticipate the final overview of the world that is described next in Revelation. The details of that overview are after the following passage about a kind of victory celebration in heaven by all the faithful of God. Those last plagues may also be the third woe mentioned previously. But first are more words of encouragement.

## The victorious souls praise God

- **And I saw like a glassy sea mingled with fire, and those who were victorious over the beast and over its image and over the number of its name, standing on the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the bondman of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,**
- **Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the nations. Who will, no, not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, because thou alone are holy? Because all the nations will come and worship before thee, because thy righteous deeds were made known** (Revelation 15:2-4).

That passage describes praises give to the Lord God Almighty by all who were victorious over the trials and temptations of life in this world. We who persevere in our love and obedience to God and his Son Jesus Christ are the victorious. Remember, the beast symbolizes the world rulers of the darkness of this sinful world; they serve the cause of the devil. Its image refers to things men worship falsely. And having the number of its name (666) means belonging to the beast and serving the devil. We who refuse that identity are persecuted by them, but in the end we will be victorious with God and Christ.

That passage tells how those who were victorious with God and Christ were standing on the glassy sea (which was mingled with fire) and they were singing praises and playing harps of God. Since those righteous souls with singing praises to God with those harps, how can anyone condemn the use of all instrumental music in praise to God?

Regarding the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, that probably symbolizes the victory celebration of those who obeyed the old covenant and those who obeyed the new cov-

enant. Moses was the prophet who brought God's old covenant to his people, the sons of Israel. And Jesus was our Savior who brought God's new covenant to his new people, those who belong to the kingdom of God, the church.

Regarding the glassy sea, remember I said earlier the glassy sea symbolized the purity of the heavenly world (see Revelation 4:6). Why that sea was mingled with fire is not clear. Since fire can symbolize power and energy, perhaps it means the elements of the heavenly world are filled with power and energy for our benefit.

Those words in that passage are great words of encouragement for all who endure the trials and temptations of this life while promoting God's righteousness and opposing evil. It tells how they will be rewarded in heaven. It also tells how all the nations (the sinners of the world) will worship God at that time, because they will learn about all his righteous deeds. Their eyes will be opened to see all of the good that God had done for them, which is why they should have worshiped and obeyed him, and been grateful, while they were still on the earth.

In heaven they will have no choice but to worship him. As Paul said, **“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).

Nevertheless, there will no doubt be some condemned souls who will continue to hate God even when all of his **“righteous deeds were made known”** to them. For remember Jesus said about hell: **“There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 8:12). There will be both sorrow and anger. Moreover, it is inconceivable that the devil will ever praise God.

Those nations who were worshiping the Lord may also include the citizens of the new heavens and earth after the end of this one. For when the book describes the new Jerusalem there, it says, **“And the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it”** (Revelation 21:24).

## God's wrath against Satan's kingdom

This next part of Revelation is about seven plagues, and a war between Christ and the kings of the world that resulted in the destruction of the two beasts. The passages about those things are very mysterious and especially difficult to interpret. Those words seem to be a description of God's wrath against Satan's kingdom.

Remember, the previous passage before the description of these plagues says they are the last ones: **“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven agents having seven plagues, the last, because in them the wrath of God is ended”** (Revelation 15:1). The wrath of God being ended with those seven plagues may mean they will be the last ones before the two beasts are destroyed and Christ reigns for a thousand years over the earth. Those things are mentioned after the description of the plagues. Therefore, the seven plagues seem to be sent primarily against the two beasts—the world rulers of the darkness of this age, and the false religions and evil ideologies—and all who support them.

## Seven bowls of the wrath of God

- **And after these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And the seven agents came forth from the temple having the seven plagues, who were clothed in pure bright linen, and golden belts girded around their breasts.**
- **And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven agents seven golden bowls containing the wrath of God who lives into the ages of the ages. And the temple became full of vapor from the glory of God and from his power. And none was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven agents were ended (Revelation 15:5-8).**

The curses that occurred when the first four trumpets were sounded (quoted previously) involved the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water, and the sun. And the description of those curses was very figurative. These plagues that resulted from the bowls being poured out (quoted next) also involved the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water, and the sun. And the description of them is also very figurative.

Those curses described earlier seemed to be against all sinners. However, these plagues seem to be directed primarily against men who are more actively involved in opposing God—men who belong to Satan’s kingdom.

The temple in heaven was called the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony. A tabernacle is a tent, and the first house of God on the earth was the portable tabernacle build and transported by the sons of Israel during their travels in the wilderness after being delivered from their Egyptian bondage. It was a tabernacle of testimony because it housed the ark of the testimony, which contained the stone tablets with the ten commandments engraved upon them.

The ten commandments was the first part and the foundation part of God’s covenant with the sons of Israel. This is what Jehovah said about his covenant with them: **“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 19:4-6).

The stone tablets with the ten commandments engraved upon them was a testimony to them of his covenant. God’s new covenant is the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus mentioned that new covenant when he said to his apostles, **“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 26:27-28). The temple in heaven was probably called a tabernacle because it was temporary. For the entire new Jerusalem will be the temple of God after this world is over.

## Against those who belong to the beast

- **And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven agents, Go ye and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth. And the first went and poured out his bowl into the earth, and a bad and evil sore**

**developed upon the men who have the mark of the beast and who worship its image** (Revelation 16:1-2).

That plague was targeted against all who are allied with the leaders of governments who oppose the rule of Christ and his righteousness, **“the world-rulers of the darkness of this age.”** The bad and evil sore probably symbolizes various problems and troubles that afflict the lives of those men, and not anything specific.

### Against the sea

- **And the second agent poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like of a dead man, and every living soul in the sea died** (Revelation 16:3).

That plague is very similar to the one that came when the second agent sounded his trumpet: **“And the second agent sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was cast into the sea. And the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures in the sea (those having lives) died, and the third part of the ships was destroyed”** (Revelation 8:8-9).

Notice however, the first curse, resulting from the second trumpet sound, only caused a minority of the creatures and ships to be destroyed. The second plague, resulting from the second bowl of God’s wrath being poured out, caused every living soul in the sea to die. That seems to symbolize God’s wrath being more severe against the members of Satan’s kingdom.

### Against the fresh waters

- **And the third agent poured out his bowl into the rivers and into the springs of the waters, and they became blood.**
- **And I heard the agent of the waters saying, Thou are righteous who is and was—the Divine—because thou judged these things. Because they poured out the blood of the sanctified and prophets, and thou have given them blood to drink; they are deserving. And I heard the altar saying, Yea, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments** (Revelation 16:4-7).

That plague was upon the fresh waters; fresh waters being another vital element for our lives in this world. The agent who carried out the plague praised God for being righteous. That plague was a just recompense for sinners because of their severe persecution of his sanctified souls and his prophets. And words from the altar in heaven reinforced what the agent said. For the judgments of the Lord God Almighty are indeed true and righteous. And no soul can justify complaining about them.

### Against the sun

- **And the fourth agent poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given him to scorch men with fire. And the men were scorched with great heat. And the men blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues, and they did not repent to give him glory** (Revelation 16:8-9).

That plague used the sun to cause men to suffer. Those men knew that God was responsible for their suffering, but instead of repenting to give him glory, they blasphemed his name.

When hearts are hardened they cannot repent. The devil and the demons know about God, and the devil has even spoken with him in his presence. Yet they still hate and oppose him. Remember, the devil is no doubt the fierce leviathan described by God as having a heart **“as firm as a stone, Yea, firm as the nether millstone”** (Job 41:24). And God also said about him, **“He beholds everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride”** (Job 41:34).

Those first four plagues—against the earth, against the sea, against the fresh waters, and against the sun—symbolize God cursing the elements of the world because mankind has joined Satan’s kingdom, and they cooperate with him in his war against God.

Regarding the last three plagues, they seem to be about things that prepared for the destruction of the two beasts, which destruction is described a little farther in Revelation.

## Against the kingdom of the beast

- **And the fifth agent poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and its kingdom became darkened, and they gnawed their tongues from the anguish. And they blasphemed the God of heaven from their pains and from their sores. And they did not repent of their works** (Revelation 16:10-11).

That plague was given specifically against the throne of the beast, which means the reign of the world-rulers of the darkness. And its kingdom consists of all who support them. The kingdom of the beast being darkened suggests that God sends the fifth plague to cause ignorance and confusion to be among them, and their frustration and agony about it were severe.

And perhaps those things were what prepared them to be gathered together for **“the battle of the great day of the Almighty God,”** which is mentioned in the next passage. For they continued to blaspheme God without repenting of their works. James wrote about how the frustrated desires of men cause them to make war, when he said, **“From where are wars and fightings among you? Is it not from here: from your pleasures warring in your body-parts? Ye desire and do not have, so ye murder. And ye envy and cannot obtain, so ye fight and make war. Ye do not have, because ye do not ask. Ye ask, and do not receive, because ye ask wrongly, so that ye may spend on your pleasures”** (James 4:1-3).

Men fight and make war because they are frustrated about not being able to indulge their pleasures. The kingdom of the beast being darkened by that plague produced much anguish within it. Therefore, I believe that made them receptive to anything that would encourage them to go forth to war, as mentioned in the next passage. In contrast to sinners, righteous men would have repented, and would not have blamed God for that plague.

## God's enemies gather to Armageddon

- **And the sixth agent poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates, and the water of it was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.**
- **And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are spirits of demons, doing signs that go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.**
- **(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.) And he gathered them together into the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16).**

The passage says, **“And he gathered them together into the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon”** (Revelation 16:16). He who gathered them together must have been the sixth agent who initiated those things. The words about **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God,”** and about **“the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon”** are only mentioned in that one passage in the Bible.

Since those evil spirits came out of the mouths of the devil and the leaders of his kingdom, they probably symbolize convincing words that captured the hearts of the kings of the world and aroused them to gather together for **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”**

In the Bible when the expression “day of God” is used it almost always refers to a time of judgment and of punishment. Therefore, that battle seems to be a time when the world-rulers of the darkness will unite together against God, but he will defeat them. And their defeat is apparently going to be great, because the passage says it is **“that great day of the Almighty God.”**

Those kings may be like some evil rulers today, as well as some believers of false religions and evil ideologies, who consider the genuine church of Christ to be an enemy that needs to be destroyed. Wicked men have no faith in God, and they can see that his true followers on the earth are few and weak. Therefore, they always think they can defeat us completely, but they never do.

Regarding the river Euphrates, remember that was to be the northern border of the land of Israel. And the curse that followed when the sixth agent sounded his trumpet involved the release of four agents at that river to punish sinners. The plague that followed the sixth agent pouring out his bowl caused that river to dry up to prepare the way for the kings of the rising of the sun. And that suggests conditions were created to make it easier for the world-rulers of the darkness to engage in **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** That was a plague against them because it brought about their destruction.

Regarding Armageddon, although the passage says the kings of the whole world were gathered together there for that battle, I do not believe that means the battle will occur at Armageddon. The battle may not happen there because the passage does not say their armies were gathered with them. The kings being gathered together at Armageddon may

simply mean they were gathered there to agree for that battle. Armageddon may even refer to a place like the headquarters of the United Nations.

A passage farther in Revelation does mention when the kings and their armies gathered together to make war against Christ: **“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army”** (Revelation 19:19). The one on the horse was Jesus Christ. Revelation says they were gathered to make war against him, but it does not say anything about that war. It only says the two beasts were defeated.

Nevertheless, regardless of the meaning of Armageddon, those two different passages (in Revelation 16 and 19) both refer to the kings of the earth uniting together to go to war. And I think they both refer to one event, which is called **“the battle of the great day of the Almighty God.”** That battle is never described, but I believe it will happen sometime after the seventh plague, which is described next.

## A great earthquake

- **And the seventh agent poured out his bowl upon the air, and a great voice came forth out of the temple of heaven, out of the throne, saying, It has come to pass. And there occurred lightnings, and thunders, and voices. And a great earthquake occurred, such as did not happen from that time men came to be upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, so great.**
- **And the great city became in three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And the great Babylon was remembered before God, to give to her the cup of the wine of the wrath of his anger. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail, like a talent weight, descended out of the sky upon men. And the men blasphemed God from the plague of the hail, because the plague of it was exceedingly great** (Revelation 16:17-21).

That passage has some similarities to a description of the end of the world. Perhaps it symbolizes the beginning of what could be called, “the end of the world as we know it.” That expression refers to a complete change in conditions. What that plague may lead to is the end of the system of the world as Satan has ruled it. And that will be replaced with a new system of the world over which Jesus will reign for a thousand years.

What that seventh plague will be is very mysterious. It speaks mainly of the effects of a great earthquake and great hail. That could refer perhaps to a terrible meteoroid storm, or even a collision of an asteroid with the earth. However, I am inclined to believe it refers to a great world war between all the nations.

Perhaps, after the kings of the world had gathered together for **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God”** (to agree to fight against God’s kingdom, the church), then God caused the nations of the world to fight against each other. And the description of the seventh plague may be about what happened in that war. Those things were preceded by **“lightnings, and thunders, and voices.”** That may symbolize great power and communications being unleashed among the nations to prepare them for war.

There is a report in the Old Testament about a time when God used that method to save his people from three enemy nations that were coming to invade them. When king Jehoshaphat and the people were praying to God for deliverance, one of the Levites there (probably one of the priests) prophesied that God would save them, and God said they would not even need to fight.

Here is how it happened: **“And when he [Jehoshaphat, king of Judah] had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who should sing to Jehovah, and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks to Jehovah. For his loving kindness is forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, Jehovah set an ambushment against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir who came against Judah, and they were smitten.**

**“For the sons of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, to slay and destroy them utterly. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another of themselves. And when Judah came to the watch-tower of the wilderness, they looked upon the multitude. And, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none who escaped”** (Second Chronicles 20:21-24).

Nevertheless, if such a war between all the nations actually occurs, I do not believe it will be the one called **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** I believe the seventh plague will be brought against the nations of the world because of their intentions to fight that battle. I believe the plague will be a war among themselves that will prevent them from going to **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”** Not only will that plague prevent them from going against God the first time, but it will prepare them for defeat when they later do go.

I believe it will happen that way because that is how the passages read in Revelation. It describes twice how the kings of the world gathered against God. The kings first gathered together to agree to go against him—gathering at Armageddon. Apparently, however, before they could gather their armies and begin the battle, their plan was prevented because of the seventh plague—warring against each other.

Then after describing the seventh plague (and the destruction of Babylon the great whore, which is described in the next passages), Revelation says, **“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army”** (Revelation 19:19). That was the second time Revelation says the kings of the earth were gathered together. And this time the passage says their armies were with them.

Nevertheless, whatever the seventh plague means, I am confident it will not happen soon. It will not happen soon because there is no evidence to indicate anything like that will. However, when it does happen it will prepare the kings of the earth for defeat in the great conflict between Jesus and Satan’s kingdom, which I discuss farther in the book.

Before I leave this part about the seven plagues, I want to comment about the warning given in the description of the sixth plague. It warns against not being prepared to meet God. It says a man who was not prepared will walk naked and they will see his shame. The righteous souls of the earth will be given new bodies and apparel in the afterlife. Sinners will be given neither; they will exist in shame as naked spirits in the lake of fire that burns

forever. And that will be much worse for them than any plague men could experience on the earth. The book of Revelation is filled with words of encouragement and warning about being prepared and reconciled to God before it is too late.

## The commerce of illicit pleasure

This part of Revelation is about a woman called Babylon, the mother of whores. I believe that woman symbolizes illicit pleasure. By illicit pleasure I mean the kind that God forbids, regardless of how legal or widely acceptable it may be in the world. And the commerce of illicit pleasure is also part of the devil's kingdom.

### Babylon, mother of whores

- **And one of the seven agents who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show thee the judgment of the great whore who sits upon the many waters with whom the kings of the earth fornicated, and those who inhabit the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication. And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness.**
- **And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast containing names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup containing abominations and the filthy things of her fornication, and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF WHORES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**
- **And I saw the woman drunken from the blood of the sanctified, and from the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And having seen her, I wondered with great amazement (Revelation 17:1-6).**

That is a figurative description of an evil but popular activity symbolized by a whore sitting upon the many waters. Her habitation was in a wilderness, which in this case, symbolizes the realm of lawlessness against God, especially the lawlessness of moral and spiritual decadence. She was arrayed in wealth and luxury, and was drinking a cup full of abominations and filthy things from her licentiousness. She was also drunk from indulging in the destruction of the sanctified of God and his witnesses.

A whore is a woman who markets her body for illicit pleasure. And so the whore described here in Revelation must symbolize the marketing or commerce of illicit pleasure. Our world is filled with that filthy business, and it is supported by the scarlet-colored beast containing names of blasphemy. The book of Revelation says more about that beast next.

The most prominent example of the commerce of illicit pleasure is the modern entertainment business, in all of its many forms. The motion picture business is a major offender. It is built upon that which is false (e.g., fictitious stories and images), which they cleverly portray as reality. And it uses them to glamorize folly and wickedness, indecency and vulgarity. It has made things such as voyeurism and other invasions of intimacy and privacy seem respectable, And it seductively promotes and encourages all manner of other evils,

including false teachings about God, his righteousness, and his followers. It is rotten and satanic to the core. And it keeps getting worse.

But anything that markets illicit pleasure of any form is part of Babylon the great, the mother of whores. Even the tobacco business is an example. All such things promote sinful pleasure. And those who promote it fight against the sanctified of God. They fight against us because they hate virtue, and we condemn what they are doing.

### What supports it

- **And the agent said to me, Why did thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou saw was, and is not, and is going to ascend out of the abyss and go into destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and will come (Revelation 17:7-8).**

There is only one such beast as described above, and that is the one which symbolizes **“the world-rulers of the darkness.”** And it is quite understandable that they would support the commerce of illicit pleasure.

The part of the passage that says the beast was, and is not, and is going to ascend out of the abyss, is difficult to interpret. But it may be saying that men in world governments who are opposed to God will cycle in the degree of their control. The satanic parts of governments dominate for a time (was), after which they lose their complete domination (is not), but that domination later returns because of the evil thoughts that arise in the hearts of men (the abyss). That process apparently cycles over and over, but those who are part of it will eventually all **“go into destruction.”**

### An interpretation

- **Here is the mind that has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains where the woman sits on them. And there are seven kings, the five are fallen, the one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain a little while. And the beast that was, and is not, he also is an eighth, and is of the seven, and he goes into destruction (Revelation 17:9-11).**

That passage is truly a riddle, but I will offer my explanation of it. The seven heads that are mountains probably symbolize the governments of the world (heads) and their countries (mountains), all of which support the commerce of illicit pleasure. Since seven symbolizes completeness perhaps the seven kings symbolize all the rulers that come and go over time. Since the heavenly agent had previously mentioned the judgment of the great whore, then the five kings that were fallen may symbolize all that were in the past before the time of that judgment.

The last king may symbolize the last of the satanic governments that support the commerce of illicit pleasure, the last ones before the great war with Christ that is mentioned in the next passages. They will not last long, because they will be destroyed in that great war.

The beast being an eighth may mean it symbolizes the composite of all the others; therefore, it belongs in the list with them, “is of the seven.”

## War against the Lamb

- **And the ten horns that thou saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those with him are the called and chosen and faithful** (Revelation 17:12-14).

The heavenly agent told John those kings were horns. And since horns symbolize force, then those ten kings probably symbolize all the military commanders and police chiefs of the world, which are “kings” in the most general sense of the word. And they will join with the satanic part of their governments at the time of a great war with Christ and his church.

Being ten of them suggests a full quantity, which is how the number ten is often used. For example, when Jacob departed Laban, for whom he had worked twenty years, among his many complaints to him, he said, “**And thou have changed my wages ten times**” (Genesis 31:41). Another example is what Job said to his three friends who were accusing him of being guilty and deserving all his suffering: “**How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times ye have reproached me**” (Job 19:2-3).

Nevertheless, although the kings of the earth will war against Christ, he will be victorious. We who are with him are the called and chosen and faithful, which means all of those in this world who believe and obey him, all who strive to become sons of God for eternity.

## When they turn against the whore

- **And he says to me, The waters that thou saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. And the ten horns that thou saw, and the beast, these will hate the whore, and will make her desolate, and will make her naked, and will eat her flesh, and will burn her with fire. For God gave in their hearts to do his will. Even to do one will, and to give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God would be ended. And the woman whom thou saw is the great city having reign over the kings of the earth** (Revelation 17:15-18).

The woman was called the great city that reigned over all the kings of the earth. What that probably means is that the commerce of illicit pleasure eventually accumulates so much wealth and popular support in a country that its rulers will cater to it.

Nevertheless, those words in that passage indicate that the military and police forces of the nations, and the evil rulers of their governments who had supported the commerce of illicit pleasure, will eventually turn against it, and will destroy it utterly. The passage says that God will control their minds to cause that to happen.

Perhaps God will open the eyes of those powers to see the need to destroy that evil business. For the commerce of illicit pleasure is a major contributor to the moral and spiritual

decadence and disintegration of nations. That is why God commanded against such things. Remember how an earlier passage said the great whore was in a wilderness. That wilderness symbolizes the spiritual decadence and progressive disintegration of nations.

Consequently, the military and police forces of the nations, and the evil rulers of their governments will destroy the great whore, not because they will return to God, but to preserve the survival of their nations.

## Babylon the great has fallen

- **And after these things I saw another agent coming down out of heaven having great authority, and the earth was illuminated from his glory. And he cried out in a mighty voice, saying, Babylon the great has fallen, has fallen, and became a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird.**
- **Because all the nations have drunk from the wine of the wrath of her fornication. And the kings of the earth fornicated with her, and the merchants of the earth became rich from the power of her wantonness (Revelation 18:1-3).**

The populations of the earth indulge more or less in illicit pleasure, including their rulers. And men have become rich by doing business with that evil activity, making great profits by pandering to the vices and base appetites of people. Nevertheless, the inevitable end of the commerce of illicit pleasure is to degenerate into a gathering place for the lowest and most vile forms of life, such as the dead body of an animal left out in the open. One modern example of the great city Babylon is Las Vegas in Nevada, which is appropriately called “sin city.” There are other such cities in the world, but Las Vegas is no doubt the richest and most famous. And the heart of its economy is the commerce of illicit pleasure.

Now I am certainly not a seer; there have been no seers in the world since the times of the Bible, nor will there be again. No man can foretell complex events in the future with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, I can discern the signs. When the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded that Jesus show them a sign from the sky, he replied, **“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”** (Matthew 16:2-3).

And from the signs it is obvious to me that if those sinners of Las Vegas do not repent and stop marketing illicit pleasure, then the time is coming when that city is going to fall and **“became a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird.”** For it is a modern example of Babylon the great, the mother of whores.

It will be like the following description that the prophet Isaiah gave of ancient Babylon: **“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, nor shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation. Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, nor shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there.**

**“But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures. And ostriches shall dwell there, and wild goats shall dance there. And wolves shall cry in their castles, and jackals in the pleasant palaces. And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged”** (Isaiah 13:19-22). And that ancient Babylon has never been rebuilt.

### Its destruction

- **And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out from her, my people, so that ye may not participate with her sins, and that ye may not receive from her plagues. Because her sins have reached as far as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.**
- **Render to her as she also rendered to you, and double to her two-fold according to her works. In the cup that she mixed, mix two-fold for her. In an amount she glorified herself and lived wantonly, give her so much torment and grief, because she says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and will, no, not see grief. Because of this her plagues will come in one day, death, and grief, and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, because strong is the Lord, the God who judged her** (Revelation 18:4-8).

Notice those words of warning to the people of God not to participate in any way with the commerce of illicit pleasure so they would not suffer from the plagues sent against it. When the sins of that filthy business reach to heaven and it boasts about its glory and security, then God will suddenly cause it to be destroyed utterly.

Notice also the important lesson in that passage that God sometimes renders punishment more severe than the guilt that brought it. The evil consequences of sins are often much greater than their immediate effects. Therefore, the punishment for sin is usually greater than the act itself.

### The loss of its commerce

- **And the kings of the earth who fornicated and lived wantonly with her, will weep and will beat their breasts for her when they see the smoke of her burning, having stood from afar because of the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! Because thy judgment has come in one hour.**
- **And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn for her, because no man buys their merchandise any more, merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearl, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and every ivory vessel, and every vessel of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and olive oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and sheep, and cattle, and horses, and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. And the fruit of the lust of thy soul have departed from thee. And all the fat and bright things are destroyed from thee. And thou will, no, not find them any more.**

- **The merchants of these things who became rich from her will stand from afar because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, and saying, Alas, alas, the great city, which was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stone and pearls! Because in one hour such great wealth was devastated.**
- **And every shipmaster, and every man who sails anywhere, and sailors, and as many as work by sea, stood from afar and cried out seeing the smoke of her burning, saying, What is like the great city? And they cast dust on their heads, and cried out, weeping and mourning, and saying, Alas, alas, the great city in which all who had ships in the sea became rich from her luxuriance! Because in one hour she was devastated (Revelation 18:9-19).**

That is a lengthy and vivid description of how much wealth is acquired in the commerce of illicit pleasure. It operates like a voracious parasite in the body of a society. Beware! Indulging in the profits of that filthy business is a great temptation for many. But it is a way that leads to destruction, which, when it happens, will come swiftly and painfully.

### The righteous rejoice

- **Be glad over her, thou heaven, and the sanctified, and the apostles, and the prophets, because God has decreed your judgment of her (Revelation 18:20).**

All the merchants and workers that were involved with that filthy business mourned bitterly when they saw its destruction, because they loved the wealth they got from it, instead of loving God and his righteousness. In contrast, all the righteous souls were glad when it happened. They were glad because every righteous soul is troubled by such an evil filthy business and condemns it. We can see how spiritually corrupting it is. I and my righteous wife, as well as all others who hate sin, are very troubled and disgusted by how much that evil filthy business has grown in modern America, grown like a deadly cancer. And we all pray for the day when it is destroyed utterly.

### The end of Babylon the great city

- **And one mighty agent took up a stone like a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus in violence Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will, no, not be found any more. And a sound of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters will, no, not be heard in thee any more.**
- **And every craftsman of every craft will, no, not be found in thee any more. And a sound of a millstone will, no, not be heard in thee any more. And the light of a lamp will, no, not shine in thee any more. And a voice of a bridegroom and of a bride will, no, not be heard in thee any more. Because thy merchants were the chief men of the earth, because all the nations were led astray by thy enchantments (Revelation 18:21-23).**

That passage gives a further description of the destruction of the commerce of illicit pleasure. That filthy business became so strong and prominent before its destruction that its

merchants were the chief men of the earth. They were the chief men of the earth because all the nations were led astray by its enchantments.

The enchantments of that filthy business include all the different kinds of illicit pleasure marketed by it. And those pleasures bewitch the people into thinking they are something good to pursue and indulge in. But in reality they intoxicate their souls and contribute to the corruption and degeneracy of their lives. The corrupting effects of commercialized illicit pleasure are very destructive to civilization. For they addict people to squandering their resources on useless and destructive pleasures.

Another form of enchantment is used when they peddle fiction. They carefully craft imaginary stories and deceitful pictures to manipulate the thoughts and reasoning of people. They enchant them with things such as charming actors, illusions, and emotional stories that are about fabricated and contrived events and things, but they give the powerful impression of reality. Part of those enchantments is the addition of things that seem to be true and right, but are cleverly manipulated to excuse committing all manner of sins. They also enchant people, and lead them astray by portraying things such as drunkenness, lying, fornication, and cheating, as comical, harmless, and inconsequential.

Remember this passage from Isaiah: **“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!”** (Isaiah 5:20). Those peddlers of entertainment often carefully craft that which is evil to make it appear good, and they distort that which is good to make it appear evil. They take the false and deceitful and they make them appear to be truth and light; they shrewdly portray that which is genuinely good, right, and just to make them seem bad, wrong, and crooked.

In their eyes everything is perverse. Women are stronger, wiser, and more successful than men; children are better than their parents; criminals are better than the police. Most authorities are portrayed as bumbling fools or corrupt tyrants. They persuade people that perversities such as homosexuality are simply other expressions of love and companionship that deserve our encouragement and support. They call fornication love, and bastards love-children. They take marriage as God would have it, and they make it seem to be oppressive and unnecessary for a happy and healthy life.

Those are just a few of the things they do to attack God and his righteousness, and promote the cause of the devil. They start with subtlety when the values of a people are moral, and they slowly infect their thinking with their “sugar coated” poisonous ideas. And as they become more successful in corrupting the minds of the people they become bolder and more aggressive in promoting the evil against the good. They also become more vicious in attacking God, his Holy Bible, and everyone who is striving to become one of his sons for eternity.

The best way to expose them is with the light of the word of God. Study the teachings of the Holy Bible, and they will open your eyes to see how those sinners use all kinds of evil enchantments to lead souls astray from God and his righteousness. Virtually every time I turn on my television set I see examples. My father, in his old age, even with his mind dulled by the first stages of his Alzheimer’s disease, complained in the 1970’s (after America became pagan) about television being “a school of crime.” He never went to see movies, but he would have been even more disgusted with them. My father was absolutely

correct about what is being broadcast on television. Most of it has become part of the commerce of illicit pleasure. Computer games are even worse for promoting evil, as is the modern music business.

## A destroyer of men

- **And in her was found blood of prophets, and of the sanctified, and of all who have been killed upon the earth** (Revelation 18:24).

The blood of prophets and the sanctified was a result of her persecution of them. The passage also says she was responsible for **“all who have been killed upon the earth.”** The pleasure of sin is what has caused the spiritual death of every soul, even from the beginning. For here is what the Bible says about the sin of Adam and Eve: **“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make wise, she took of the fruit of it, and ate. And she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate”** (Genesis 3:6). Eating that fruit was illicit pleasure for them. And no doubt the reason why Cain murdered his brother Abel was to satisfy his unjustified anger, which is another form of illicit pleasure.

Peter taught the same thing when he said, **“Because of which, the precious and greatest promises have been given to us, so that through these ye might become companions of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption in the world in lust”** (Second Peter 1:4). That passage says the corruption of the world is a result of lust. Thus, in a very general sense illicit pleasure of some kind is what causes the spiritual death of every soul. And only Jesus Christ can redeem us from that condemnation.

## Rejoicing in heaven

- **And after these things I heard as a great sound of a large multitude in heaven, saying, Praise the Lord, the salvation, and the power, and the glory of our God! Because true and righteous are his judgments, because he has judged the great whore who ruined the earth by her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his bondmen from her hand.**
- **And a second time they said, Praise the Lord! And the smoke of her ascended into the ages of the ages. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying, Truly! Praise the Lord!** (Revelation 19:1-4).

All the righteous souls in heaven rejoiced when the great whore was destroyed, because she ruined the earth by her fornication. The marketing of illicit pleasure does not just contribute to the corruption and degeneracy of the lives of those who indulge in it. It also foments hatred and violence against all the righteous, because we condemn and oppose that filthy business. That evil business has been a major contributor to the destruction of faith in God and his righteousness in America where it had been so strong. There is nothing that degenerates character more than indulging in sinful pleasure.

Of course, the devil and his disciples always deny the destructiveness of sin. And they use every idea they can conceive to blame other things for those destructive consequences. But remember these words of Paul: **“Be not misled, God is not mocked, for whatever a**

**man sows this he will also reap”** (Galatians 6:7). Therefore, be not misled about the destructiveness of sin. Even though it may be slow in developing, the commerce of illicit pleasure is extremely destructive to any civilization.

We, the faithful disciples of Christ, condemn that evil business, and they hate and persecute us because of it. And since they now have the greater power, we suffer by them. As Jesus said to the Jews when they arrested him: **“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”** (Luke 22:53). Nevertheless, God will eventually destroy that filthy business, and then we can rejoice with all those in heaven. We can praise the Lord even more when he judges that great whore, and avenges our blood (literally and figuratively) from her hand.

Now remember, that whore symbolizes a spirit, one that has produced many worldwide examples of the commerce of illicit pleasure, each of which rises and falls over time. Nevertheless, the entire filthy business will eventually be destroyed throughout the earth. For Revelation later tells about the defeat of the dragon and the two beasts, followed by the thousand year reign of Christ over the earth. Therefore, the commerce of illicit pleasure will apparently not be completely destroyed upon the earth until that time of great victory for Christ and his church.

## The marriage of the Lamb

- **And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Praise ye our God, all his bondmen and those who fear him, the small and the great. 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** (Revelation 19:5-8).

John said he heard a voice in heaven commanding all the righteous to praise God because he reigns, after which he heard the mighty sound of them praising the Lord our God. And we should all obey God, and be glad and rejoice, and give glory to him, because we have been blessed with an invitation to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb.

Remember, Jesus is called the Lamb of God (see John 1:29). And his wife is the new Jerusalem in heaven, because a later passage in the book says, **“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. 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”** (Revelation 21:1-5).

That means collectively we the sanctified of God will be united with Christ in that great capitol city of heaven under his headship. Notice how the scripture says the fine linen she was arrayed with **“is the righteous deeds of the sanctified.”** Our salvation depends not only upon our faith but also upon our performing righteous deeds. That is how we prepare ourselves to be a part of the marriage of the Lamb; that is how we prepare ourselves to be united with Christ in heaven under his headship.

## Blessed are those who are invites

- **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 19:9).

Those words expressed the promise of God to bless those who have been called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That means all who believe and obey Jesus Christ (the called) will become part of the new Jerusalem in heaven as sons of God for eternity. And those words were reinforced with the judgment that they were true sayings of God. And no doubt John was commanded to write those words so that we could be encouraged by them.

## Worship God only

- **And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he says to me, See thou not. I am a fellow bondman of thee and thy brothers, those who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy** (Revelation 19:10).

Only our heavenly Father and his Son are to be worshiped. The most blatant violators of that command are the leaders of the Catholic church, particularly how they worship and venerate their Pope and other specially chosen persons they call “saints.” It is not wrong to bow or kneel before a ruler as a show of deference, but it is very wrong to worship them in any way.

And regarding prophecy, all who teach and proclaim the good news of Christ can be called prophets in this Christian era, because **“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”** And only that testimony can be called prophecy now, because there are no longer any seers inspired by God, nor will there be. The last men who had that ability were disciples of Christ who lived during the time when the New Testament was being written.

These next passages describe events that happened after the seven plagues. Remember, I believe those plagues prepared Satan’s kingdom to be defeated by Christ.

## Christ ready for battle

- **And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sits upon it called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems having names written, and a name written that none knows except he him-**

**self, and clothed in a garment dipped in blood. And his name is called The Word of God** (Revelation 19:11-13).

This is the beginning of the war that defeated Satan and his kingdom (including the beast and the false prophet). The rider of the white horse was Jesus Christ, for near the beginning of this book a passage says, **“These things says the Son of God, who has his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet resembling highly refined metal:”** (Revelation 2:18). And another passage about him says, **“These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And those with him are the called and chosen and faithful”** (Revelation 17:14).

God has given Jesus Christ supreme authority (except for the Father himself), for **“upon his head are many diadems.”** He was also riding upon a white horse. White symbolizes purity, and horses symbolize power. And that certainly describes Christ in heaven.

The passage also says he was called Faithful and True. He was called that probably because only God and his Son are perfectly faithful and true (see Romans 3:3-4). The name he has that none knows except himself probably means he has an exclusive identity. For he is the only begotten Son of God; the only one begotten directly from him.

His garment dipped in blood no doubt symbolizes his sacrificial life on the earth, which earned him the right to judge and make war. And whenever he judges and makes war he is always right and just. As the passage says, **“... in righteousness he judges and makes war.”** War is always necessary whenever there is sin to defeat.

He is also called the Word of God. For John said at the beginning of his biography of Jesus, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”** (John 1:1). Jesus was called God, because he was God the Son. He was called the Word in John’s biography of him, and he is called the Word of God here in Revelation. He is called the Word because he is the means by which God communicates with men. And he is the means by which God sends his commands from his throne to influence and exert final control over everything. For he is the Lamb that has control of **“the seven Spirits of God being sent forth into all the earth”** (Revelation 5:6).

## Armies of heaven

- **And the armies in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, pure white** (Revelation 19:14).

That is a description of Christ with his armies in heaven following him. There are indeed armies in heaven. Consider this example of a time when God sent a heavenly army to protect his prophet Elisha. The king of Syria had sent an army to capture him, and here is part of what happened: **“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”** (Second Kings 6:15-17).

Those horses and chariots of fire were part of an army from heaven sent by God to protect them. And remember these words: **“And war developed in heaven: Michael and his agents to fight with the dragon. And the dragon and his agents fought”** (Revelation 12:7). Being on white horses, and clothed in fine lined, pure white, symbolizes their purity as servants of God.

There are armies in heaven and there was a war there. Those things happened because of the great conflict between God and the devil and their respective agents. However, the conflict between God and the devil in heaven was a kind of cold war until Satan was condemned. And that is when it became a hot war resulting in Satan being cast out of heaven. And now with the armies of heaven following the Son of God, Revelation tells how a hot war is about to commence on the earth, which will result in Satan’s defeat and bondage. However, John says later that Satan’s defeat and bondage will only last a thousand years. His final defeat will be at the end of the world.

### The sharp two-edged sword

- **And a sharp two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, so that he would smite the nations by it. And he will tend them with a rod of iron** (Revelation 19:15).

When John earlier described the heavenly appearance of Jesus, among the things he said, was, **“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 1:13-16). And remember, the two-edged sword coming out of his mouth no doubt symbolizes the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. For Paul spoke of it that way when he described the full armor of God that we should put on: **“... And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”** (Ephesians 6:17).

The passage in Revelation says that Jesus is going to smite the nations (the sinners of the world) with the word of God. Here is what Jesus said while he was here on earth: **“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). The word of God contains truth about reality, and that truth is going to smite the sinners of the world. It will smite them by exposing how evil and destructive they are, and by proving they deserve condemnation.

Although the sinners of the world will be smitten by the word of God, they are also going to be ruled with a rod of iron, with irresistible force. That will happen at the end of the world when they are cast into hell. However, John says it will also happen on the earth for a thousand years, for he describes a hot war between God and Satan in the world.

The armies of Christ in heaven are invisible to us, but they still operate in the world. There are many places in the Bible that tell how the agents of heaven did things in the world. And some of those times were when they intervened in battles to determine the outcome. Although invisible in the world, Christ and his armies will apparently intervene in some way when he defeats Satan and his kingdom. Remember however, that defeat will only be for a thousand years. John describes that later in this book of Revelation.

## Applying God's wrath

- **And he treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God. And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** (Revelation 19:15-16).

That passage tells how Jesus is **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”** He was identified that way by the name written on his garment and on his thigh. This is the only place in the Bible that mentions a name written on a garment. However, part of the garment of the high priest of the people of Israel was a “breastplate of judgment,” which contained the names of the twelve sons of Israel.

Here is how Jehovah commanded it be made: **And thou shall make a breastplate of judgment, the work of the skilful workman. Thou shall make it like the work of the ephod: of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, thou shall make it. It shall be foursquare and double, a span shall be the length of it, and a span the breadth of it. And thou shall set in it settings of stones, four rows of stones: a row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row, and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond, and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst, and the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be enclosed in gold in their settings. And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, every one according to his name; they shall be for the twelve tribes** (Exodus 28:15-21).

Perhaps since Jesus is our great high priest in heaven, his name was written on his garment there. And that garment was no doubt much more glorious and beautiful than the one of the high priest of the people of Israel.

Revelation does mention names written on foreheads. One passage says, **“And I looked, and lo, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with it a number, a hundred and forty-four thousand, having its name and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads”** (Revelation 14:1). A second passage is about Babylon, the mother of whores: **“And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup containing abominations and the filthy things of her fornication, and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF WHORES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH”** (Revelation 17:4-5). A third time is about the sanctified of Christ in heaven: **“And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads”** (Revelation 22:4).

However, the passage about Jesus having the name King of kings and Lord of lords also says that name was written on his thigh. The significance of his name being written on his thigh is difficult to understand. The first mention in the Bible of a man's thigh is when Abraham commanded his servant to swear about going to his kindred to take a wife for his son Isaac.

Here is what the record says: **“And Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had, Put thy hand, I pray thee, under my thigh. And I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that thou will not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I**

**dwelt. But thou shall go to my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac”** (Genesis 24:2-4).

Apparently the servant’s hand under Abraham’s thigh represented participation on a most solemn vow. For a man’s thigh is a personal and private part of his body. Hence, the name of Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, being written on his thigh may symbolize his name and authority being personal and private, given to him and him alone by God the Father.

Regarding **“the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God,”** when John was earlier describing the end of the world, it was Jesus who harvested the righteous souls, but an agent of heaven harvested sinners. For the passage says, **“And the agent sent his sickle to the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs”** (Revelation 14:20).

However, in this hot war in the world between God and Satan, Jesus himself will lead the armies of God, and he himself will tread **“the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God.”**

When the winepress mentioned earlier was trampled, the passage says that **“blood came out from the winepress, up to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.”** The next passage describes what will happen when Jesus **“treads the winepress of the wine of the wrath of the anger of the Almighty God.”**

### Preparing for slaughter

- **And I saw one agent having stood in the sun, and he cried out in a great voice, saying to all the birds flying in mid-heaven, Come, gather together to the great supper of God, so that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who sit upon them, and the flesh of all men, both freemen and bondmen, and both small and great** (Revelation 19:17-18).

The passage in Revelation that preceded the one above described Jesus with his armies. The next passage describes the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him. Therefore, the above passage about the great supper of God must be a prophecy about a great slaughter that will result from that war, because it calls for the vultures to come together in preparation for it.

### Satan’s kingdom defeated

- **And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sits upon the horse, and against his army.**
- **And the beast was taken, and the false prophet with it who did the signs in its sight by which he led astray those who received the mark of the beast and those who worship its image. The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone.**

- **And the others were killed by the sword that comes forth out of his mouth (of him who sits upon the horse), and all the birds were filled from their flesh** (Revelation 19:19-21).

That passage speaks about the kings of the world and their armies gathering together to make war against Christ. Remember, when the kings of the world first agreed to go against God, he sent the seventh plague against them. I believe that plague was a great war among all the nations. But whatever that upheaval was, it prevented the kings of the world from going against God (meaning his kingdom on the earth, which is his church). Apparently after that plague, however, the beast and the kings of the earth prepared again to make war against Christ, which is indicated in the above scripture.

Remember, the beast symbolizes a satanic spirit within rulers of the world—the rulers of the darkness. And although they may have fought each other, as often happens in this sinful world, that evil spirit was still operating in them. And so they again gathered together to war against Christ. But this time when they gathered together they had their armies with them. And I believe that war will be what was called in the description of the sixth plague, **“the battle of the great day of the Almighty God.”** For agreeing to that battle was probably why the kings of the world had gathered together the first time.

And the result of that battle will be the defeat of the two beasts and all who are allied with them. Those allies are men with the mark of the beast and who worship its image, which means every man who cooperates with the world-rulers of the darkness, and the false religions and evil ideologies. Satan himself is also going to be defeated, because the next passage in Revelation describes how he will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years.

Perhaps the great catastrophe of the seventh plague will cause a spiritual awakening in the hearts of many men, which will make them receptive to the power of the word of God. And the enlightenment given them by that knowledge will enable them to successfully defeat Satan’s kingdom.

The earlier passage said that Jesus will smite the nations with the sword coming out of his mouth. The world-rulers of the darkness, and the false religions and evil ideologies, will be defeated with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Therefore, that great battle will use the power of words and ideas to combat Satan’s kingdom. Remember how the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (the second beast) sent the spirits of demons from their mouths. Those spirits of demons seem to symbolize loathsome but convincing words that captured the hearts of the kings of the world and aroused them to gather together for **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God.”**

I believe in a similar way, the sword of the Spirit, which symbolizes the beautiful word of God, will capture the hearts of many men after the seventh plague. Remember this passage that Paul wrote: **“For though walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for the demolition of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ, and having in readiness to avenge every disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled”** (Second Corinthians 10:3-6).

The sword of the Spirit is our weapon for **“casting down imaginations, and every high thing exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought captive into the obedience of the Christ ... .”** Therefore, I believe knowledge of the word of God will bring the thoughts of many men captive into the obedience of the Christ. And that will arouse them (with the invisible help of Christ and his armies) to defeat the world-rulers of the darkness and the false religions and evil ideologies. And that defeat will establish the supremacy of truth and righteousness in the world.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that final war will be one of words and ideas only. Remember, it took a war of force to cast Satan out of heaven even though he was condemned justly. Therefore, **“the battle of that great day of the Almighty God”** will also include a war of flesh and blood. For the devil and his allies cannot be destroyed by words only.

When Paul said that **“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,”** he was not condemning our use of carnal weapons. There is a time and a place for both kinds of weapons. Our weapon for the church (the sword of the Spirit) is the word of God, which is used to capture the hearts of men for obedience to Christ. Carnal weapons are used to enforce justice.

Remember what Paul said about the administration of justice: **“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).

When the world-rulers of the darkness and the false religions and evil ideologies are condemned by authorities that are approved by God, then the use of carnal weapons is justified. And indeed, their use is mandatory. For that passage in Romans says those authorities do **“not bear the sword in vain,”** because they are helpers of God for what is good.

Notice in the previous passage in Revelation how the two beasts were thrown into the lake of fire. And the next passage says the devil will be bound and cast into the abyss. They were thrown and cast, and that requires force. It will take force to get rid of them. Words will defeat them in the hearts of most men, but force will be required to destroy them. How such force will be applied, I know not. Nevertheless, I believe it will take some kind of carnal war, and that will result in **“the great supper of God”** mentioned earlier. Remember, it took a war to cast Satan out of heaven.

Hide yourself

There is a passage in Isaiah that seems to prophesy these same events. It says, **“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors around thee. Hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be passed over. For, behold, Jehovah comes forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.**

**“In that day Jehovah with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the swift serpent, and leviathan the crooked serpent, and he will kill the monster that is in the sea”** (Isaiah 26:20-27:1).

Jehovah warned his people to protect themselves from the wrath of his indignation when he punished the inhabitants of the earth for their sins. The part about the earth disclosing her blood and not covering her slain is very similar to the previous passage in Revelation about the birds and **“the great supper of God.”** Dead bodies will not be buried; they will be eaten by the vultures

The words in Isaiah about leviathan, the swift and crooked serpent, seem to symbolize Satan. Remember, leviathan almost certainly symbolized Satan in the book of Job. He is also called a serpent in the book of Genesis, and a dragon in the book of Revelation. The monster in the sea mentioned in Isaiah is probably the beast that Revelation describes as a monster that rose out of the sea. That prophecy in Isaiah says the serpent would be punished, and the monster in the sea would be killed. These passages in Revelation say that Satan will be punished in the Abyss, and the beast that rose out of the sea will be cast into the lake of fire, which the Bible says is the second death: **“This is the second death, the lake of fire”** (Revelation 20:14)..

Jehovah’s **“hard and great and strong sword”** is not the sword of the Spirit. It is a carnal sword used to fight a carnal war. Here is an example of that from the book of Ezekiel that speaks of the sword of Jehovah: **“Therefore thus says the lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt. And I will break his arms, the strong arm, and that which was broken, and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand. But I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a mortally wounded man.**

**“And I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon, and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down. And they shall know that I am Jehovah when I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries. And they shall know that I am Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 30:22-26). God said he was going to put his sword into the hand of the king of Babylon. And that sword symbolized carnal weapons used to fight a carnal war.

Therefore dear brothers, even though God is going to unleash his wrath against the inhabitants of the world for their iniquities, be not afraid. Simply protect yourselves until the violence passes, lest you have your blood shed with theirs. Not every righteous soul needs to be in the midst of that carnal war against Satan and his kingdom, although no doubt some will be. But every righteous soul needs to be in the midst of God’s spiritual war against Satan and his allies. However, our weapon in that war is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

## The thousand year reign

- **And I saw an agent coming down out of heaven having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he seized the dragon, the old serpent,**

**who is the Devil and Satan, who leads the whole world astray, and bound him a thousand years. And he cast him into the abyss, and locked and sealed over him, so that he would no longer lead the nations astray until the thousand years were ended. After these things he must be loosed for a little time** (Revelation 20:1-3).

Notice how these passages about the defeat of Satan and his kingdom, and about those thousand years are very brief. And as with many other passages in Revelation, what they mean is very controversial. Nevertheless, I believe Satan is going to be bound and cast into the abyss literally for a thousand years so that he will not be able to lead the nations astray.

And that will result in righteousness reigning in the world, which will then greatly exalt mankind. For the wise king Solomon said, **“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”** (Proverbs 14:34). Because Revelation says so little about it, I am going to make some conjectures about what will happen during that thousand year period. Never forget, however, they are only conjectures, and conjectures should only be considered as possibilities.

The destruction of those two beasts, and the dragon being bound and cast into the abyss, meant there was no longer any serious opposition to Jesus Christ or false information about God in the world. The passage above says the devil would no longer lead the nations astray for that thousand years. His kingdom and everyone that was a part of it will be destroyed. And he will not be able to manipulate the minds of men with evil thoughts and evil ideas. Therefore, men will not be deceived about God and his righteousness.

During that thousand years the nations would no longer be led astray about God and his righteousness as they are now. Therefore, during that thousand years the general populations of the nations and their governments will acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ, and they will be committed to his righteousness. However, I must add about the church and governments, that just as the family structure is not a part of the church, so also governments should not be part of the church; those things are separate social structures. Nevertheless, they are all required to obey Christ and his commandments.

Although men would acknowledge the lordship of Christ, as with every generation of believers, individuals would vary in the degree of their commitment. And there will certainly still be sin during those thousand years. There will be much more truth about things spiritual, and much more righteousness, which means sins will be greatly diminished. Nevertheless, sins will still occur, because the world will still be a place of tribulation, where every man exists in a body of flesh with lusts, which Peter said, **“war against the soul”** (First Peter 2:11). And remember, 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”** (Galatians 5:17).

Now regarding God’s judgment of us, each man is going to be judged relative to the conditions of his time and place. Countries have always varied widely in how much peace, law, and order exist in them. And some very prosperous and orderly countries only have a few citizens who believe in Christ. Righteousness exalts a nation whether its citizens are committed to Christ and his church or not. God rewards men for wise and righteous living even without faith in him and his Christ. But always remember, such rewards are only for this life.

Therefore, even when it is easy to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, that will not be enough. Remember what he said about that: **“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”** (Matthew 7:21). Even those who live in times of great righteousness will still need to endure testing by suffering, because Paul said, **“... it was necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations”** (Acts 14:22). And consider these words of 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”** (First Peter 4:12-13).

It is certainly more difficult to live right in the sight of God at some times and places than others. Therefore, God is going to judge us relative to our conditions and our opportunities. A man who sins to a certain degree in an evil generation filled with sin, will be judged less severely than a man who sins to the same degree in a very righteous generation. That is no doubt one reason why Jesus forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery (see John 8), which was a capital crime in the law of Moses. He demonstrated the fact, to everyone who was there, that all of her accusers were equally guilty; they had just not been caught. That generation was very corrupt spiritually, and God destroyed them four decades later with the Roman army. Therefore, that adulteress was not judged as strictly.

There are several passages in the Bible that support the idea of judging relative to conditions, which I quote and discuss later in my commentary of Revelation. Therefore, even though righteousness will prevail during those thousand years, that will not give them a special advantage to become sons of God for eternity. For they will be judged more strictly. The trials and temptations men face will be different, but personal sacrifice for God’s righteousness will still be necessary. These words of Jesus will still be valid: **“If any man wants to come behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 16:24-25). And men will be judged more strictly because they will live in a time when righteousness prevails. For Jesus also said, **“And to every man to whom much was given, much will be required from him”** (Luke 12:48).

### The reign of Christ and his disciples

- **And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them. And judgment was given to them and the souls of those who were beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus, and because of the word of God, and who did not worship the beast nor his image, and did not receive the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand. And they lived, and reigned with the Christ the thousand years.**
- **The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. On these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years** (Revelation 20:4-6).

Regarding the first resurrection, I believe that refers to righteous souls who are being resurrected to heaven before the end of the world. They are like Abraham, Moses, and Elijah

who are mentioned in the New Testament as having already been resurrected to heaven. The second resurrection will be the one at the end of the world, and it will also contain righteous souls. Those righteous souls will also be **“blessed and holy”** just like those of the first resurrection, but they will not be brought to heaven before the end of the world. I also believe the first resurrection will not happen at one particular time, as will the second resurrection. The first resurrection seems to be an ongoing resurrection, because Abraham, Moses, and Elijah each lived centuries apart.

That passage also speaks of the reign of Christ during that thousand years, which obviously means reigning over the earth. Consider this passage about the time when Christ, the Lamb, received the book with the seven seals: **“... the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls containing incense, which are the prayers of the sanctified. And they sing a new song, saying, Thou are worthy to take the book and to open the seals of it, because thou were killed and purchased us from God by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. And thou made them kings and priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth”** (Revelation 5:8-10).

Notice that passage says those men would be **“priests to our God, and they will reign over the earth.”** That is very similar to what Revelation says will happen during those thousand years: **“... they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years.”** The first passage says they will reign over the earth, and the second passage says they will reign with Christ a thousand years. Apparently therefore, some souls (a “first fruit”) from every part of the world are being resurrected to reign as priests with him over the earth when that thousand year period comes to pass. For Christ is our high priest, as this passage says: **“Because of which, holy brothers, companions of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our affirmation, Jesus Christ ...”** (Hebrews 3:1).

Now it is important to recognize that they will reign *over* the earth, but not *upon* the earth. For the Bible teaches that neither Jesus nor any of the resurrected souls will return to live upon this earth. As the book of Hebrews says, **“And inasmuch as it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, judgment, so also the Christ, having been offered once in order to take up the sins of many, will appear a second time, independent of sin, to those waiting for him for salvation”** (Hebrews 9:27-28). What some men call “the Rapture” will never happen.

The second time Jesus appears to the world will be like this description he gave to his disciples about the end of the world: **“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. 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 24:29-31).

That prophecy is about the end of the world. And **“the tribulation of those days”** simply refers to whatever particular tribulations will be occurring then. For remember, this is a

world of tribulation. With those words Jesus was saying that the end times will have tribulations like every other time in this world of vanity in the bondage of corruption. It will not be a time of special tribulation.

For when Paul was speaking about the end of the world, he told how, just before the end, people would say it was a time of peace and safety: **“But about the times and the seasons, brothers, ye have no need to be written to you. For ye yourselves know accurately that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction approaches them, as the woman having birth pangs in her womb, and they will, no, not escape”** (First Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Also about his coming again, remember what Paul said about 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). The nearest thing to Jesus coming a second time to the earth is when he comes in the clouds at the end of the world to gather his faithful disciples to be with him in heaven forever.

Those righteous souls of the first resurrection were not going to be resurrected in the flesh to reign upon the earth. I believe what the passage in Revelation means is that their spirits are being resurrected to reign over the earth together with Christ from heaven. Perhaps they will even reign from their habitation in the paradise there. And the way those souls in heaven on their “thrones” (meaning places of command) would reign with Christ for that thousand years is through their spirits.

Remember, the seven Spirits of God that are before his throne are the source of power that he uses not only to energize everything, but also to have the ability to control anything. And perhaps some of that energy will be channeled into the paradise of heaven, where all the souls of the first resurrection will be, so that their spirits can use that energy to help them reign over the earth—not to apply energy for it, but to enable them to guide the righteous men on earth in the decisions they make and in the work they do. Perhaps somehow the strengthened spirits of those resurrected men (including Abraham, Moses, and Elijah) will radiate down from heaven to work in the minds of Christians together with the Holy Spirit of God.

Consider this passage from Isaiah: **“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).

Perhaps, in an opposite way, the spirits of those resurrected men in heaven will radiate down to help the righteous men of the world (1) to open their ears to hear, (2) to open their eyes to see, and (3) to open their hearts to understand. And in that way men on earth will gain enormous knowledge and ability to **“Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth,**

**and have power over it ...”** (Genesis 1:28). And by fill the earth, it means to fill the entire universe, not just this one planet.

Since God sends his Spirits upon the earth to influence and control men, I believe that is how the righteous souls that were resurrected to heaven will reign over the earth with Christ for a thousand years. Neither Jesus nor any of those righteous souls will bodily return to the earth to reign; they will reign from heaven. And they will reign by radiating their spirits to the earth to influence the men here. I believe those righteous souls in heaven will be given the power to extend their spirits the way God does. Thus, they can use those forces to guide the minds of men on the earth, but not in miraculous ways.

Therefore, during those thousand years there will be an explosive-like growth of knowledge and development. Consider the twentieth century. It was a time of astonishing material development in spite of containing much evil, including two extremely destructive world wars. If that much development could occur in one century with all those things that interfered with it, what could happen in ten centuries during a time of peace and righteousness?

I also believe it will be a time of unprecedented unity among men. For the most righteous disciples of Christ will be the great men of the world. They will be the rulers and the judges, the chief engineers and developers, the major scientists and clinicians, the finest professionals and craftsmen, the best educators and preachers. They will be the great men in every human endeavor. That contrasts completely with the world as it has been, because it is now dominated by the devil. Remember what Paul said, **“For notice your calling, brothers, that not many are wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many eminent”** (First Corinthians 1:26).

Remember, Satan has the power to use his spirit to lead men astray. And the Bible mentions when God even gave him the power to control the elements when he was afflicting Job (but not in any miraculous way). That is described in the following passage:

**“And it fell on a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, that there came a messenger to Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away. Yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.**

**“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God fell from heaven [probably a lightning storm], and has burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.”**

**“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have taken them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee.**

**“While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness [probably a tornado], and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead, and only I alone have escaped to tell thee”** (Job 1:13-19).

Satan sent evil men against Job because Satan is the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. If Satan has the power to use his spirit to influence evil men, then God can certainly give us the power for our spirits in heaven to influence righteous men. And that is how the righteous souls in heaven are going to reign over the earth with Christ for a thousand years. They will reign with Christ by the influence of their spirits from heaven.

Now some men have interpreted ambiguous words spoken by Peter, to support their idea that Jesus is going to return to the world, and transform it back into what they believe was a perfect world at the beginning. Here is what Peter said: **“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).

I believe the expression **“the times of restoration of all things,”** simply means that the full authority of God over all things will be restored. Remember, Satan is now **“the ruler of this world”** (John 12:31). The world was created to be ruled by men under the supervision of God, but men have given themselves over to the devil to be ruled by him.

Consider also this passage where Jesus speaks of all things being restored: **“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).

Jesus said that John the immerser would restore all things. But John certainly did not restore the earth to what it was at the beginning, which was not perfect anyway. After the creation when God said the world was very good (see Genesis 1:31), that simply means it was very good for the purpose which he made it.

## The end of the world

- **And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed out of his prison** (Revelation 20:7).

How long the world will last after Satan is loosed from his prison is not told. I believe mankind will have colonized the entire universe by that time. Therefore, God could allow the world to exist thousands of years more before the end and the final judgment. Jesus said that nobody but God himself knows how long the world will last (see Mark 13:32). However, I personally believe the world will last many thousands of years longer.

Nevertheless, Revelation does say that the world is again going to forsake God. For the next passage says that Satan **“will come forth to lead astray the nations ... .”** During those thousand years Satan will not be able to manipulate them with his deceit and temptations. And he will not have a powerful kingdom to serve him. But after he is released from bondage he will again lead men astray from God and his righteousness. He will lead them astray because the majority of men have always been vulnerable to manipulation by the

devil. They are vulnerable to him because their faith in God is weak, and they prefer living to satisfy their worldly lives.

John warned about living only to satisfy our earthly lives, when he 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. Because everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”** (First John 2:15-16). Since most men love the world and live to satisfy their earthly lives, then when Satan regains his power, they will again submit to him.

With Satan’s release from the abyss he will again poison the hearts of most people, and he will provoke some of them to become more combative against God and his holy word, the Bible. Such men will no doubt begin with subtlety and deceit, just as Satan has always done. Deceitful men and scoffers will again challenge the truth about spiritual things, and will falsify history to deny how righteousness has exalted nations. And they will rebuild Satan’s kingdom, which will create a new age of spiritual darkness.

Many scholars today even deny there is such a thing as truth. They are like Pilate who scoffed when Jesus said to him, **“Every man who is of the truth hears my voice”** (John 18:37). Pilate responded, **“What is truth?”** Then without waiting for an answer, he went out to the people who were clamoring for Jesus’ crucifixion. Pilate’s response indicates to me that he thought there was no answer.

Men who are not of the truth, and do not believe in it, think nothing of mixing facts with fiction to manipulate people’s thinking and promote whatever goals they may have. The modern television docudrama is a common example. Therefore, just as throughout history, except for those thousand years, the nations will be led astray to turn from God and his righteousness. Satan, with the power of his influence in evil men, he will rebuild his kingdom by using the aggressive ones among them to become the world-rulers of that new darkness.

Revelation says nothing about the return of the two beasts, nor does it say anything about Babylon, the great whore. Nevertheless, I believe the devil will use other sinful men to invent new religions and ideologies that will support those rulers. Also the world will no doubt begin again to glorify, glamorize, and embrace folly, wickedness, and perversity. And they will again commercialize illicit pleasure. They will do those things because the nature of our flesh will not change, and Satan will again be able to lead hearts astray.

The book of Revelation gives no details about the various forces of evil that might arise after the thousand year reign. I am confident it would be far too complex to describe to us. It only speaks of the final conflict between good and evil. Remember, I believe the entire universe is going to be inhabited by mankind. And there will no doubt be many thousands of planets populated by men, perhaps even millions of them. This vast universe was not created just to **“declare the glory of God”** (Psalms 19:1). Therefore, the variety of things that men will do in all of it could not possibly be summarized in any book.

## The last battle

- **And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed out of his prison. And he will come forth to lead astray the nations in the four corners**

of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the battle, of whom the number of them is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city.

- **And fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. And the devil who leads them astray was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also were the beast and the false prophet. And they will be tormented day and night into the ages of the ages** (Revelation 20:7-10).

That passage is the only place in the New Testament that mentions Gog and Magog. However, there is a rather lengthy prophecy about them in the book of Ezekiel. The prophecy there about them is so lengthy that I am just going to summarize here what it says. It begins this way: **“Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the ruler of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him”** (Ezekiel 38:2). (Jehovah often called Ezekiel “son of man.”)

Jehovah said he was against Gog, and he was going to bring him forth with all his great army and the many peoples with him. Jehovah said that Gog, in the latter years, would come into the land of Israel that had recovered from its destruction. And he and all his hordes would come like a storm, like a cloud to cover the land.

The Lord Jehovah said of Gog, **“It shall come to pass in that day, that things shall come into thy mind, and thou shall devise an evil plan”** (Ezekiel 38:10). Jehovah said Gog was going to plunder the land of un-walled villages, the waste places that were now inhabited, and the people (of Israel) who were gathered out of the nations. Jehovah said again that Gog, his mighty army, and the many peoples with him were going to come against his people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. Jehovah said he was going to bring him against his land, so that the nations would know him, and he (Jehovah) would be sanctified in him.

Then with many words Jehovah described how he was going to destroy Gog and the many peoples with him. And he said, **“And the nations shall know that I am Jehovah, the Holy One in Israel”** (Ezekiel 39:7). Jehovah said those who dwell in the cities of Israel would go forth and plunder those who plundered them. And they would make fires of the weapons. He said it would take seven years before they were all burned. And it would take seven months to bury all the dead bodies. Then Jehovah told Ezekiel to speak to the birds and beasts for them to assemble to his sacrifice. He said they would eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of rulers. He said, **“And ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the lord Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 39:20).

Jehovah said the house of Israel would know that he was Jehovah. And the nations would know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity. Then he said he would now bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and they would dwell securely in their own land. He said, **“For I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the lord Jehovah”** (Ezekiel 39:29).

That prophecy about Gog and Magog was followed by a very lengthy and detailed description of a new temple in Jerusalem. That was followed by information mainly about the priests, the offerings and other ordinances of worship, and a new plan about the distribution of the land for the twelve tribes (see Ezekiel 40-48). All those things are at the end

of the book, and they take ten to fifteen pages in a typical modern Bible. Most of what it says is the description of the temple.

All of those things in the book of Ezekiel are very figurative. For none of those things have ever happened in the land of Israel nor will they. What that prophecy seems to describe, in very symbolic language, is (1) the final battle of the devil's kingdom (symbolized by Gog and Magog) against God's people, the church, and (2) the establishment of the new Jerusalem in heaven. It was a prophecy about the same things described in the book of Revelation about the last great battle on earth, and the coming of the new Jerusalem in heaven.

The disciples of Christ are now God's temple upon the earth, because Paul said to us, **"Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?"** (First Corinthians 3:16). And the book of Revelation tells how the entire new Jerusalem, where all the sons of God will reside with him, will be the temple of heaven. There is much more said about the new Jerusalem farther in the book.

Why there is such a lengthy and detailed description in the book of Ezekiel about a new temple, I can only conjecture. What I believe is that we should make no effort to understand all that detail, because for Christians it is meaningless. Perhaps there are two purposes for that detailed description: The first purpose is to inform (with figurative language) those who accept Christ that the new Jerusalem in heaven will be a complex place filled with detail. And the second purpose is to mislead and confuse those who reject him, by causing them to think that description is literal. Only Christians who accept what the New Testament teaches can understand that lesson. For the New Testament says there will never be such a temple upon the earth.

The book of Revelation says the devil is going to **"lead astray the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the battle, of whom the number of them is as the sand of the sea."** He is going to lead the nations to surround the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city. The encampment of the sanctified probably symbolizes the worldwide population of all the disciples of Christ. The beloved city probably symbolizes all the worldwide congregations of Christ, because cities are places where people congregate to live and work.

How the devil will gather together the nations to assault the church will no doubt depend upon the highly advanced technologies of communication and transportation that will be available then. Nevertheless remember, the devil is unable to unite all the nations except in their opposition to God.

The main lesson in that passage seems to be that even when the disciples of Christ and their churches are scattered throughout the universe the devil will be able to arouse the world-rulers of that new darkness (symbolized by Gog) and all their nations (symbolized by Magog), and unite them together in an effort to destroy the children of God.

Nevertheless, when the nations seem to be on the verge of victory, having **"surrounded the encampment of the sanctified and the beloved city,"** then God will send fire from heaven to devour the nations. That fire from heaven will probably be the fire sent from God to destroy the world. For when that happened the devil was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet were, to be tormented day and night forever.

Therefore, dear brothers, fear not even when it seems the congregations of Christ and all of his disciples are on the verge of destruction. Trust and believe in God, because his holy word prophesies that such dangers will happen. But the final victory always belongs to our Lord and those who belong to him.

## The final judgment

- **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.**
- **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. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if any man was found not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).**

That passage describes the great day of judgment when all men will be judged. They will be **“judged from the things that were written in the books, according to their works.”** Twice in that passage the record says that men will be judged **“according to their works,”** not according to their faith. Our faith is the foundation upon we build our good works. And it is according to our works that we will be judged.

For God is keeping records of all that we do, all that every man does. Those “books” are records from his great database about how every man has lived. And I suspect those recordings are so complete that they can recreate exactly what happened at any time in full detail, as if it were happening again. For remember, even the hairs of our head are all numbered.

The book of life only contains the names of the children of God. Therefore, every man and woman who has not believed and obeyed Christ to become a son of God, will be thrown into the lake of fire called hell. I say much more about the judgment of hell, and even the possibility of being released from there, in my book *Becoming Sons of God for Eternity*.

The book of life is mentioned five times in the book of Revelation. However, there are only two other passages in the Bible that mention it (Psalm 69:28 and Philippians 4:3). Nevertheless, the names that are contained in that book determine who will live in the new Jerusalem and who will be cast into the lake of fire. For it is the record God is keeping of those who belong to him. And perhaps on the judgment day every person will be able to see whether his name is there or not.

Nevertheless, I remind you again, we are all going to be judged by our works that are recorded in those other books. Indeed, Jesus even told the people, **“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 passage in Revelation says we are going to be judged by our works, not by our faith. As James said, **“For as the body without a spirit is**

**dead, so also faith without the works is dead”** (James 2:26). Therefore, be not led astray by the very popular but false doctrine of salvation by faith only.

Of course, just as we are not saved by faith only, neither are we saved by works only. Paul explained how no man can be made right before God from works only. For he said, **“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).

What Paul meant by works of law is works based upon the laws of God’s righteousness. And regardless of how hard we try to live righteously, we all lack the quality and character of spirit to live without having sinned, and consequently being condemned.

Therefore, we cannot be saved by our works only, because just as with Adam, a single sin will condemn us. We can only be saved by faith in God and obedience to him through Jesus Christ. We are saved by faith and works together. You can learn much more about the relationship between salvation by faith and salvation by works in my book *The Law of God Before and After Christ*.

The sinners of the world are going to be cast into the lake of fire. It is called the second death because it follows the death of our mortal bodies. It is a living death because the spirits of all who are cast there will exist for eternity. Every offspring of God cannot cease existing, because their spirits came from God himself. And since God is eternal, that makes our spirits eternal.

Therefore, the existence of the condemned will be a living death of eternal torment. For when Jesus was describing the end of the world, he said, **“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). The lake of fire is also called the furnace of fire.

In the day of judgment God will separate all the souls that ever lived upon this earth into two groups: those who will be rewarded with life as sons of God for eternity in the new Jerusalem, and those who will suffer punishment in the lake of fire that burns forever. For Jesus said, **“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).

He also said, **“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). Sheep are meek; goats are aggressive.

The next part of Revelation contains perhaps the most encouraging words in the Bible. For it gives us a glimpse of the great reward that God will give to all who become his sons for eternity.

## A new world and capital city

- **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** (Revelation 21:1-2).

That passage says our world, the first heaven and the first earth, will pass away to be replaced by a new heaven and earth. Remember, I believe that the greater heavenly world surrounds our world. And our universe is a mere temporary district inside of it. Remember this passage from Isaiah: **“Thus says Jehovah, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”** (Isaiah 66:1). In one sense the entire world of heaven is God’s throne, for it is the place where he reigns. And our entire physical universe is his footstool, being beneath the greater heavenly world, but associated with it.

Regarding the passing away of our world, Peter 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.**

**“Therefore, all these things being disintegrated, what kind ought ye to be in holy actions and pieties, anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of God, by which the heavens, being made fiery hot, will be disintegrated, and the elements dissolve, being intensely hot? But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:11-13).

And speaking about God and the world, the author of the book of Hebrews said, **“They will perish, but thou are permanent. And they will all become old as a garment. And thou will roll them up as a mantle, and they will be changed. But thou are the same, and thy years will not cease”** (Hebrews 1:11-12).

Perhaps when our world is disintegrated in great heat, everything about it will be purified and transformed into an imperishable substance to be integrated into the new earth. For remember when Paul wrote to his brothers in Philippi, he said our earthly bodies were going to be transformed into heavenly bodies: **“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). Of course, our transformation does not literally involve our flesh, because our earthly bodies return to dust.

Perhaps the new heavens that John saw are the heavens of the greater world that surround our present world. They could be called new in the sense that they will replace the heavens we now have. Or perhaps it will be some new heavens of a kind unimaginable to us. For God said, **“Behold, I make all things new”** (Revelation 21:5). Whatever it will be, John said he saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

What is meant by the new earth is also unclear. It could refer to a special planet in that new heaven. However, I am inclined to believe it refers to a new imperishable substance for the material contents of that new heaven. For the word earth can mean either our planet or the material of it. Also John said, “... **the first heaven and the first earth passed away ...** .” That no doubt means that not only did all the outer space of our world pass away, but all of the material contents of it did as well.

That great city new Jerusalem will no doubt be the center of the new world. Astronomers say our planet earth is not the center of the universe, because they claim there is no center. They say our universe is like the surface of a balloon. However, that only describes a two-dimensional space, and our world is three-dimensional. There are many mysteries about our world, and mankind will never solve all of them (see Ecclesiastes 8:16-17).

Nevertheless, our planet is the center of the world in the spiritual sense. For it is where man first began. And it is where the only begotten Son of God humbled himself to live as a man, so that he could redeem us and build his church, the kingdom of God upon the earth. In that sense, therefore, the earth is the center of our world. For it is the center where mankind began, and from which they will spread out into the rest of the world.

I believe the new Jerusalem will be the center of the new world in every sense, because that is where God will reside. And it may even function like our sun does for our planets. It will be the center of all the other heavenly bodies of that greater heavenly world. And it will illuminate them, because when Jesus was speaking of what happens after the final judgment, he said, “**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). And when the heavenly agent was speaking to John about the new Jerusalem, he said, “**And the nations will walk by the light of it. And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it**” (Revelation 21:24).

The book of Revelation describes many things about that great city, but it says nothing about what kind of earth it will be upon. It may not even be upon any kind of earth, but may simply float in the space of the new heaven the way the celestial bodies of our world float in our space. That new heaven and earth are going to be so different from our world that even if it were explained to us we would probably not be able to understand most of the things about it.

## God dwells with men

- **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 21:3-4).

Those are such wonderful words of encouragement. There will be no suffering and sorrow there because there will be no sin. It will be a place of love and good will. For the men and women who are going to dwell in heaven with God are those who strove to become his sons for eternity by believing and obeying his Son Jesus Christ. Remember, Paul spoke of that when he said our citizenship was in heaven. He also said we belong to 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).

Remember also, John wrote in another book about our being given a new body that is similar in form to the glorious body of our Savior in heaven. He said, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made known what we will be. But we know that whenever he is made known we will be like him, because we will see him as he is”** (First John 3:2).

Paul also spoke about how and when we will be given those new bodies: **“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed. For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality”** (First Corinthians 15:51-53).

There are some passages in Isaiah that also tell about our afterlife. Here is what Jehovah said in one of them: **“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people. And there shall no more be heard in her the voice of weeping and the voice of crying.**

**“There shall be no more from there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days. For the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them. And they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them”** (Isaiah 65:17-21).

That passage is similar to the one in Revelation where it says there will be no suffering and sorrow. What the passage means by **“the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”** is that the memory of our lives in this world will probably be like memories of unpleasant dreams that quickly fade away after we awaken.

Nevertheless, the Bible teaches we will still be able to recognize persons there. For when Jesus was warning about the punishment of hell for Jews who were workers of unrighteousness, he said, **“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”** (Luke 13:28).

What I think God means by **“no more from there an infant of days,”** is that none of us will begin our lives there the way we do as infants in this world. We will be given bodies the way Adam was giving his body. Our new body will be mature and able to communicate with whatever language is used there.

Many translations add words to that passage like **“who lives but a few,”** making it mean no infant will die young. They corrupt their translations by adding commentary that says what they think the passage means. They have no right to do it (unless it is required for translation because of the differences in the nature of the languages). Such added commentary makes their translations more popular, but they sin by doing it. For what they add is often wrong, and it distorts what the scriptures say. They need to heed this warning from Solomon: **“Every word of God is tried. ... Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar”** (Proverbs 30:5-6).

What I think the passage means by **“the child shall die a hundred years old,”** is that we will begin like children in our knowledge of that eternal world. And it will take the equivalent of a hundred years for us to acquire all the knowledge we need to function fully there. Although God will endow our new body with things such as the innate ability to know the language, we will apparently still need to learn many more things to become fully prepared for our individual roles there. We will not live by instinct.

Thus our initial developmental stage will not end (or “die”) until after a considerable amount of time. Therefore, in a figurative sense our “childhood” will “die” after the equivalent of a hundred years. It will probably take that long because of how immensely more complex that world will be.

The part about an old man filling his days, may mean that when we become fully developed in body and mind there (for our particular role) the time we spend with that role will be completed as intended. The productive performance of every son of God in the new Jerusalem will be successfully completed, and will never be cut short, as so often happens in this world. Only then would the man prepare for a new role.

### All things new

- **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 (Revelation 21:5-6).**

I believe God had originally fashioned his body in the form of a man when he was preparing to create things for the purpose of having sons for eternity. He transformed himself into the form of a man because only men would have that potential. By transforming himself into the form of a man that would make it easier for us to identify with him as our heavenly Father. However, having the form of a man meant he was in a weaker form, which no doubt is what Paul meant by his **“weak thing”** (First Corinthians 1:25).

Nevertheless, sometime after he ends our world and makes the final judgment of every soul, he will transform himself back to his original true form. Hence, the words **“I have become.”** His form will become what it was originally. Therefore, he will no longer have the need for guards to protect his throne, or for his seven Spirits to give him the power of complete control and awareness. For he will no longer exist in the form of a man, which was his **“weak thing.”**

And since the above passage says he makes all things new, that must include the new bodies we will be given for the new Jerusalem. They will be of the same form as the one God had originally, because we will be his sons for eternity. And that new body will be nothing like the one we now have, with its hair, eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that the power, the glory, and the beauty of those new bodies will far surpass anything we can ever imagine. Remember what Paul said, **“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).

God will probably also give his faithful heavenly agents new bodies, because they now also have the form of men. Remember, the human form was designed for men in the world

to become sons of God for eternity. And since our world will no longer exist, the human form will be obsolete. Perhaps God will even give the citizens of those heavenly nations new dwellings and other things as well, because he said he makes all things new. However, perhaps he will commission the citizens of the nations in that heavenly world to build those things, while God himself will design what they will be. And perhaps we will work with him in the new Jerusalem designing many of those things that he is going to make new. Remember, it was God and his Son Jesus Christ who created the world.

God told John to write about those things, because the **“words are true and faithful.”** God wants us to know that he is going to make all things new, and we will live with him in his new world as his sons for eternity. And he reinforced what he said by saying the words were true and faithful. In other words, we can be completely assured that those things will happen—if we trust and obey him while we live in this world.

Therefore, dear brothers, be encouraged and always remain faithful and grateful. For the sorrows of this world are as nothing compared with what awaits us in that new world. Paul probably suffered as much for God as any other man (except for Jesus our Savior), yet he always remained faithful and grateful. You can read a summary in Second Corinthians (11:22-29) of some of the things he suffered. Yet even with all his sufferings, he said about them, **“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).

## The water of life freely given

- **I will give to him who is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely** (Revelation 21:6).

Those words are no doubt figurative. For when Jesus once met a Samaritan woman at a well and asked her for water, he 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”** (John 4:10). That living water was the good news of salvation that Jesus came into the world to give.

However, the fountain of the water of life in the new Jerusalem probably includes much more than the good news of salvation. The fountain that God mentioned may be the river of water of life that John was shown in the new Jerusalem: **“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its thoroughfare”** (Revelation 22:1-2). That water of life is probably like the tree of life was in the garden of Eden; it will perpetuate the life of our new incorruptible bodies.

## He who overcomes

- **He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to me** (Revelation 21:7).

Those are such marvelous words of encouragement. Could there ever be a greater gift that God could give us? What could be more wonderful than to be a son of God and live with him for eternity? 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).

What God meant by overcoming was overcoming the temptations, trials, and tribulations of this life. For it is only in this troubled and sin-filled world where we can become qualified to become his sons for eternity. Therefore, dear reader, let nothing prevent you from overcoming, so that you too can inherit his incomparable gift and become one of his sons for eternity.

## Sinners cast in 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).

That list of souls who will be cast into the lake of fire covers a range of sinners. It is, of course, simply representative and not inclusive. Perhaps the worse of the sinners in that list are the murderers, who are condemned in every society. Yet even many murderers are being excused by the sinners who now control my country, but they will not be excused in heaven. The other sins listed are rarely even called crimes in most of the countries of this sinful world.

Cowardice is only considered a crime in the military, although most people have a low opinion of cowards. However, I believe the use of the word coward in that passage refers to believers who are timid about their faith and refuse to combat sin. They live by the pagan proverb about prudent living, which says, “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” They indeed see evil in material things, but they keep quiet about the evil of spiritual things. They lament about the troubles and afflictions of the world, but they prefer to ignore the sin and wickedness that cause those things to happen, except perhaps in very general terms phrased so they will not offend. They flee from controversy about God’s righteousness because they fear conflict, rejection, and persecution.

Cowardice is the only one in the above list that could be applied to ordinary believers, and it is becoming increasingly common during these faithless times. Yet few of them realize how deadly it is to their souls. The hypocrites among them will no doubt deride my accusation because they love the praises of men more than the praises of God. Such men are like the Jews who derided Jesus when he said we cannot serve God and mammon: **“And the Pharisees, being lovers of money, heard all these things, and they sneered him”** (Luke 16:14).

Fornication and idolatry are now fully accepted in my country, and considered a right in most countries of the world. Sorcery has also become quite respectable in pagan America. Lying is widely practiced throughout the world, and is often even expected. The only thing criticized about it among sinners is getting caught doing it.

The sinful and abominable cover a very wide range of sins. They include all of the evil things that the world is enamored with. Remember, Jesus said, **“... what is lofty among men is an abomination in the sight of God”** (Luke 16:15). Many abominable practices are becoming very common in pagan America. People such as adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, transvestites, drunkards, gamblers, those who use vulgar language, those who dress obscenely, those who engage in lewd and licentious dancing, and many other such kinds of things are examples of the sinful and abominable.

Notice that simply being an unbeliever will condemn a soul to be cast into the lake of fire. A man may not be a murderer or a fornicator, or a coward, or do any of those other things. But if he refuses to believe in Christ and will not obey him, he will find himself in the lake of fire with all of those other sinners.

## The new Jerusalem

- **And there came one of the seven agents who had the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues, and he spoke with me, saying, Come, I will show thee the woman, the bride of the Lamb.**
- **And he carried me away in spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, the light of it similar to a most precious stone, like a jasper stone being crystal clear, which has a great and high wall having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve agents, and names inscribed, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel: from the east, three gates, and from the north, three gates, and from the south, three gates, and from the west, three gates. And the wall of the city having twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-14).**

That holy Jerusalem (which is the new Jerusalem) was personified as a woman, the bride of the Lamb. Remember, the book of Revelation is filled with figurative descriptions, and the one above about that great city is no doubt also very figurative. It had the glory of God, and was arrayed with precious jewels, which certainly means it was of great beauty. It had a wall and gates, which indicates it will not be open to everybody in that new world. It will only be open to the sons of God and perhaps some of God's select agents there. And the agents at each of the gates were probably guards to protect that limited access.

The gates had inscribed on them the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, and the twelve foundations had on them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The gates with the names of the tribes of Israel probably symbolize the fact that our ability to know God and his will for us came from the nation of Israel. And the foundations with the names of the apostles probably symbolize how their obedience to Jesus Christ was the foundation for building the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The great and high mountain where John was taken to see that holy city may have been one in that new heavenly world. It could also have been like the high mountain where Jesus was taken by the devil to see all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them (see Matthew 4:8). That experience was no doubt what we now call a virtual scene; it was not a literal mountain. That was the only way the devil could have shown him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. For, unlike God, he does not have the kind of power needed to do that in reality.

## Its size

- **And he who spoke with me had a measure, a golden reed, so that he might measure the city, and the gates of it, and the walls of it. And the city lies**

**foursquare, and the length of it is as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs, the length and the breadth and the height of it being equal. And he measured the wall of it, a hundred and forty-four forearms, a measure of a man, that is, of an agent (Revelation 21:15-17).**

That must have been some measuring reed! For twelve thousand furlongs is fifteen hundred miles. That great city was therefore described as being in the shape of a cube having sides that were fifteen hundred miles long. That means it has a volume of 3,375,000,000 cubic miles. If a building of that volume had only one floor with a standard height of ten feet, it would cover an area of 1,782,000,000,000 square miles. Since the total area of the surface of the earth is 196,800,000 square miles, such a building would cover an area that was over 9,000 times greater than the entire surface of the earth. That does not even consider the facts that about seventy percent of the earth is covered with water, and that millions of square miles of its land are almost uninhabitable to men, places such as Antarctica and the Sahara desert.

Of course, nobody knows what kind of architecture will be in that great city, but that comparison can give you a very general idea of the colossal size of the new Jerusalem, where all the sons of God will reside with him for eternity. And some foolish people believe that only 144,000 souls will be saved to go there. Their concept of the new heaven and earth is so tiny.

Now in spite of the great magnitude of the size of the new Jerusalem as reported in Revelation, I have no doubt the number is figurative. Remember, twelve is another number in the Bible that symbolizes fullness. Moreover, even considering the huge size of that measurement, I believe it is a great underestimate. For God knows it is impossible for us to comprehend the magnificent reality of the new Jerusalem in that new world.

The new Jerusalem is the city where God will dwell in his throne. And it will be filled with his sons, who will be the most talented and exalted creatures in all of that new world. Therefore, it will be a very dynamic place. If you think modern cities are dynamic busy places, the activity of the new Jerusalem will far exceed the activity of the largest cities of the earth, even more than the size of the new Jerusalem exceeds their sizes.

And we will all work together with God and Jesus, in great joy and harmony. For we will all be loving brothers as God's sons for eternity. If you can imagine the most beautiful and perfect relationship between a husband and his wife here on earth, all of our relationships there will be far more wonderful. And there will never be any kind of evil there. Fraternal unity is a wonderful thing even in this world of tribulation, as the psalmist said, **"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"** (Psalm 133:1).

Dear reader, let not scoffers cause you to doubt the promises of God. He created you and gave you life. Can you doubt your own very existence? How then can you doubt Almighty God who created you? Do righteous fathers and mothers love their children? How then can you doubt your heavenly Father's love for us? Remember these beautiful words of Jesus: **"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).

There is a popular myth that says the sanctified of God who live with him in heaven will spend all their time sitting on the grass in a garden singing praises to him. That myth has provoked many unbelievers to scoff about heaven, and say they would be bored there. Their idea about the new Jerusalem is completely distorted and simplistic. It is just another example of how the devil leads them astray from faith in God.

Unless they repent, they are going to be deeply shocked and bitterly disappointed when they get a glimpse of the truth about its reality and its glories. For remember, when Jesus was speaking about the end of the world, he said, **“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). There will be both sorrow and anger.

It is interesting that John was also commanded to measure the wall of the city, which was a hundred and forty-four (twelve times twelve) forearms. A forearm length is the same as a cubit, which is one and a half feet long. Therefore, the wall of that great city was two hundred and sixteen feet high. I have never heard of any wall on earth that was so high. That height is equivalent to a twenty-one story building. That is just another symbol of the exclusive privacy and security of that city, where God will reside with his sons for eternity.

Sinners will never enter the new Jerusalem, nor will they ever see God. For Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God”** (Matthew 5:8). Only the pure in heart will see him. Sinners will only see his Son Jesus Christ. For Revelation says about him, **“Behold, he comes with the clouds and every eye will see him, even the men who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will wail against him. Yea, Truly”** (Revelation 1:7). And Paul said, **“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”** (Romans 14:10).

## Its beauty

- **And the structure of its wall was jasper. And the city was pure gold, similar to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city adorned with every precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second, sapphire, the third, chalcedony, the fourth, emerald, the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius, the seventh, chrysolite, the eighth, beryl, the ninth, topaz, the tenth, chrysoprase, the eleventh, jacinth, the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls apiece, each one of the gates was of one pearl. And the thoroughfare of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass** (Revelation 21:18-21).

Those words are, of course, also figurative, but they describe a place of supreme beauty, glory, and purity. And Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper, **“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). Since God only took six days to create this world for us, think of what he can create for us in the thousands of years he has before our world ends.

As glorious and beautiful as that description is in Revelation, it is only about the most superficial parts of it: the wall, the foundation, the gates and thoroughfare. I have no doubt that great city will not only contain magnificent places that Jesus is preparing for us, but it will be filled with marvelous furnishings, fabulous machines, and devices of super-high technology. We are only given an occasional glimpse of such wondrous things from heaven in passages like this one about a chariot of fire from 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).

Paul said it was impossible to even imagine the glorious things that God has prepared for those who will be his sons for eternity. It would have been very difficult for men of the ancient world to understand all of the amazing machines and other devices that men have created in the modern world. And what God is creating for our new world is far more amazing, and even more difficult for us on the earth to ever understand, regardless of how far advanced the civilization of mankind will develop.

I believe that since God is the great master Creator, and we will be his sons there, then perhaps our major activity will be to design and create marvelous new things. Remember what Isaiah said we would do in the new heavens and the new earth: **“And they shall build houses, and inhabit them. And they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them”** (Isaiah 65:21). Those words were no doubt chosen to simply inform those humble souls of over twenty-five hundred years ago that we would be productive and prosperous. The things we will actually create in the new Jerusalem will be far more wonderful.

If all the creatures that God made for this world are marvelously designed, then what God and his sons will design in that new world, will be incomparably more marvelous. And there will be nothing bizarre or foolish there like some of God’s creatures he created for this world. Remember when Paul spoke of the foolishness of God: **“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men ...”** (First Corinthians 1:25).

## Its temple

- **And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty is the temple of it, and the Lamb. And the city has no need of the sun, nor of the moon, so that they might shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the light of it is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by the light of it** (Revelation 21:22-24).

The temple of God in Jerusalem was also called the house of God because it symbolized his presence on the earth. Since God and his Son are going to reside in the new Jerusalem, then that great city will itself be the temple. That is further indicated by this blessing Jesus gave to us: **“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will, no, not go out any more. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem (it comes down out of the heaven from my God), and my new name”** (Revelation 3:12). The new Jerusalem is going to be the temple of the new heaven and earth, and Jesus said that he was going to make us “pillars” in that temple.

Moreover, the entire new Jerusalem is apparently also going to be the throne of God and his Son, which means it will be the new command center for all of creation. For when

Jesus gave another blessing, 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). How could countless billions of the eternal sons of God sit with Jesus in his throne if it were not the entire city? We will all literally sit with Jesus in his throne, because that throne will be the entire city of the new Jerusalem.

The passage in Revelation says the glory of God illuminated that great city, and the light of it is the Lamb. Remember however, when Jesus was talking about our lives after the final judgment, he said, **“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”** (Matthew 13:43). We will, therefore, apparently reflect the light of God and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) the way our moon reflects the light of the sun. Yet the amount of light we reflect will be like the brightness of the sun itself.

Since the book of Revelation is filled with symbolism, our shining forth as the sun may symbolize how God will use us for the enlightenment and guidance of the nations of that heavenly world. The light of God, mentioned in the passage from Revelation, may also refer to some kind of new radiant energy that God will send to supply those nations with both power and information.

## The nations of the new world

- **And the kings of the earth bring to them the splendor and worth of the nations into it. And the gates of it will, no, not be locked by day, for there will be no night there. And they will bring the splendor and the worth of the nations into it. And there will, no, not enter into it anything profane, and doing an abomination and a lie, since they are not written in the Lamb’s book of life** (Revelation 21:24-27).

The citizens of those nations are probably his heavenly offspring that now inhabit God’s greater world, and they have kings to head their governments. And the new Jerusalem will be the capital city of all of those nations, where God, his only begotten Son, and those whom Jesus redeemed to be God’s other sons, will be the supreme rulers.

The passage says their kings will bring their splendor and worth into the new Jerusalem, which will be their capital city. That is further evidence to indicate that the sons of God for eternity will be rulers, designers, and creators, because God and his Son Jesus Christ are the supreme rulers and creators, and we will be God’s other sons there.

We will create and the heavenly nations will manufacture. We will be the designers and the engineers, and they will be the builders and makers. And their kings will bring what they manufacture—their splendor and worth—into the new Jerusalem. And those treasures will no doubt include marvelous devices of unimaginable complexity and function, the best of which will be brought into that capital city for the sons of God to use and to enjoy. Of course, since the citizens of those nations will be God’s offspring, they will design things as well. However, what they design will probably be things needed for their own use in the heavenly civilization outside the new Jerusalem.

## Sources of sustenance

- **And he showed me a pure river of water of life, bright as crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its thoroughfare. And on this side of the river and on that was a tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit according to each month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations** (Revelation 22:1-2).

Those are, of course, also figurative words. The water of life and the tree of life must symbolize the sources of sustenance provided for the sons of God there. And that source of sustenance will come from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The Bible teaches that God is the ultimate source of sustenance for every creature on earth. And the above passage in Revelation indicates God will still be the source of our sustenance. The water of life and the tree of life may symbolize special energy and information that is only given to God's sons. For having imperishable bodies the only sustenance we will need is for energy.

The leaves of the tree of life used for the healing of the nations are no doubt for those heavenly nations. It was not for the nations of our earthly world, because the new Jerusalem will not be inhabited until this world is ended. Those words suggest the new Jerusalem and everything in it will never need healing, but the nations around it will. And if they need healing that means things can go wrong there, unlike in the new Jerusalem.

The citizens of those nations will not be sons of God, but they will still be offspring of God having free will. Therefore, they will still be able to commit sin. Remember the passage about heavenly agents who sinned: **“For if God did not spare agents who sinned, but delivered them up to chains of darkness, having been cast into hell being reserved for judgment ...”** (Second Peter 2:4). And they will no doubt make mistakes and commit errors in their endeavors. For unlike the new Jerusalem, those nations will not be places of perfection. Their lives will be fallible, unlike ours in the new Jerusalem. Otherwise there would be no need for healing.

Remember, the spirits of God's offspring are eternal, meaning imperishable. And the substance of the heavenly world is imperishable. However, that substance can still be used wrongfully. And that will sometimes happen, because all spirits who are not God's sons in heaven are fallible. And whether they do wrong things accidentally or deliberately, the results will require fixing. And sometimes it may require healing from the leaves of the tree of life. Perhaps as sons of God some of us may go out into those nations temporarily to provide the substances (from the leaves of the tree of life) and the counsel those nations need for healing, whenever and wherever it is needed.

We will also serve as judges. For when wrong things are done deliberately, the guilty will need judging. Remember, what Paul said when he was rebuking the church at Corinth about going to law against each other: **“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). As sons of God in heaven we will also judge the agents there.

## Serving and ruling

- **And there will be no curse there. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his bondmen will serve him. And they will see his face, and his name is on their foreheads. And there will be no night there, and they have no need of a lamp and the light of sun, because Lord God will illuminate them. And they will reign into the ages of the ages** (Revelation 22:3-5).

This world is subject to many curses from God because men are so sinful. Therefore, there will be no curse in the new world. Remember what Peter said about it: **“But we anticipate a new heavens and a new earth according to his promise, in which righteousness dwells”** (Second Peter 3:13). There will be no curse because righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and earth. Nevertheless remember, those heavenly nations will still need judging and healing, because they will not be places of perfection like the new Jerusalem.

However, the sons of God in the new Jerusalem will never sin. The quality of our spirits, developed in this world of tribulation, will keep us from ever offending God in that perfect place. Remember what James said about the value of our trials in the world: **“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).

And remember, Peter told how our faith, more precious than gold, is proven by fire: **“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 1:6-7). Peter also said, **“... he who has suffered in flesh has ceased from sin”** (First Peter 4:1). No righteous soul who lived in this life will ever sin again. We will live infallible lives.

Notice in the above passage of Revelation that it says God’s sons will be his bondmen. We will not be bondmen like those of the earth. We will be bondmen to serve him as obedient sons, just as obedient sons on earth serve their fathers. As his sons for eternity, we are bondmen of him because we are bound to serve him, which is a supreme privilege and honor. That is very different from the role of bondmen on earth. Our labor and service for him will be full of joy and pleasure.

Remember what was said about the great multitude clothed in white robes that were praising God before his throne. When John asked one of the elders about them, he replied, **“These are those coming out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will dwell among them”** (Revelation 7:14-15). They serve him day and night. A passage earlier said there will be no night there. Therefore the above passage about serving him day and night may be figurative. Or it could perhaps refer to the light cycles of the nations in the heavens around the new Jerusalem.

When John was describing the sons of God in heaven, he also said **“his name is on their foreheads.”** That will identify us as sons of God. And perhaps that will be an important

indication to the citizens of the surrounding nations to inform them what our rank is, the same way insignias are used in the military.

Such identification may be necessary, because we will no doubt go out among those nations as their masters and judges, even over their kings. For the passage in Revelation says we will reign into the ages of the ages. And Jesus said, “... **he who overcomes, and he who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations**” (Revelation 2:26). That means over the nations of the new heaven and earth.

Nevertheless, God and the Lamb will always reign as the supreme Lord and Master. For although we will reign, we will always be his sons and bondmen to serve him, to serve him with great joy and pleasure. Perhaps our service will be like the pleasure of joyful play, but unlike play it will be serious and productive as well as pleasurable. There are some men even in this world who so love their work that it is more pleasurable to them than any recreation. And everything we do in that new world will be far more pleasurable than any of the things men do in this life that give them pleasure.

The last part of Revelation consists primarily of words to encourage obedience, and also words to warn against disobedience. For everything in the Bible was written for the ultimate purpose of developing faith in God and obedience to him.

### A blessing on those who keep the words

- **And he says to me, These words are faithful and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his agent to show to his bondmen the things that must quickly come to pass. And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book** (Revelation 22:6-7).

Remember, the words “**quickly come to pass,**” do not mean everything described in Revelation was going to occur quickly. Because those words were followed with his statement, “**And behold, I come quickly.**” That was about two thousand years ago, and the Lord has not yet come, nor do I think he will come anytime soon.

Coming quickly may mean the complex series of events described figuratively in Revelation were going to quickly begin. For the Greek word translated “come to pass” in that passage is GENESQAI, which root word is GINOMAI. That word has no exact English equivalent. Its precise meaning must be determined from the context. Although Jesus is not coming quickly as we judge time, he will come quickly in one sense for each of us. I explain how farther on.

The Lord also spoke a blessing for every man who keeps the words of the prophecy of the book. By keeping the words of the prophecy he no doubt means obeying the warnings and the commands given in it.

### Worship God only

- **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 was commanded not to fall down and worship the heavenly agent. And we should never bow down and worship anyone except God and his Son. John was commanded to worship God, not the agent. Remember however, bowing or kneeling before someone of high position simply to show deference to them would not be wrong.

The heavenly agent who showed the apostle John all those things said

he was John's fellow bondman

he was of John's brothers the prophets

he was of those who keep the words of that book ( Revelation).

Being a fellow bondman means they were united in serving God. Being of John's brothers the prophets, means the agent was proclaiming the word of God. And being of those who keep the words of the book means he was among those who were obedient to what it taught. Hence, he was with John a fellow bondman of God proclaiming the word of God and obeying what it taught. He was not worthy of being worshiped. Only God is.

## Seal not the words

- **And he says to me, Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near** (Revelation 22:10).

The words of the prophecy of this book are to be kept open. That means they are to be read, studied, and applied. That also means they should be understood. And that is no doubt the most difficult part about reading them. It has been my goal to interpret the various parts of the Bible accurately and faithfully to their true meaning, in order to help myself and others to understand them as God intended. And that will help strengthen faith in God and obedience to him for all who love truth and righteousness. And remember, the words "time is near" are not to be interpreted by what men consider to be a short time. Seven thousand years can be a mere seven days in the sight of God.

## Doing right or doing wrong

- **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** (Revelation 22:11).

If men insist on doing wrong and insist on being filthy, then God is not going to stop them. God uses offices of authority to punish criminals. However, God is not going to stop everything wrong and everything filthy. He is not going to stop every sin because he is giving men freedom in this world to test their souls. God is not going to forcibly end all of the evils committed in this world, not until he ends the world itself.

Consider the example of king David. He bed with the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was a faithful warrior in his army, and he was away fighting a battle. When Uriah's wife told David she was with child because of him, David called for Uriah and asked him how the battle was faring. Then he told him to go home. David was hoping Uriah would lie with his wife so he would think the child was his own.

However, Uriah did not go. And when David asked him why the following day, Uriah said to him, **"The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in booths, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field. Shall I then go into my house, to**

**eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou live, and as thy soul lives, I will not do this thing**” (Second Samuel 11:11). Uriah was a Hittite, but he was a righteous and noble man. David even got him drunk so he would go in to his wife, but Uriah still would not do it.

David then sent a message by Uriah to Joab the commander of the army. The message told Joab to make Uriah vulnerable to be killed by the enemy, which is what happened. When Uriah’s wife heard of his death she mourned him. After that the Bible says, **“And when the mourning was past, David sent and took her home to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased Jehovah”** (Second Samuel 11:27).

David had committed adultery and murder, both of which were capital crimes in the law of Moses. However, nobody else knew of David’s guilt. Only Uriah’s wife knew of his adultery. And only Joab knew of the instructions David gave him to make Uriah vulnerable to be killed, which was certainly not enough to accuse David of murder. Therefore, David could not be charged and tried by men for what he had done.

God certainly knew David was guilty, And he intervened in a special way by sending a prophet to expose David, and tell him that he was being placed under a terrible curse for the rest of his life. God does not act as a witness in the trials of men, nor does he apply the punishment of the law for them. Consequently, David escaped being caught and tried by men. Nevertheless, David still suffered severely.

Scoffers no doubt accuse God of being partial toward David. However, God has his own ways to punish sin. Those ways are always impartial, and they are always right and good and just. There are some punishments that are worse than death, and David’s punishment may even have been one of them. You can read about the terrible consequences of that curse against David in the Old Testament.

God does not himself force men to stop sinning, nor does he himself punish each man in the ways he commanded for us. Nevertheless remember, there are many ways men suffer because of their sins. For God has so made the world that sin is always somehow punished. For I said in my book *King Solomon’s Advice for the World* (pg 142),

In his infinite wisdom the Lord has built into the laws of nature the consequences of wickedness, even as the rewards of righteousness are built into the universal design plans of God. Ironically, the very behavior of the wicked initiates their own punishment; it sets in motion a train of events (often imperceptible to us) that causes the evil they create to rebound upon their own heads. It may be years in coming, but the consequences are as inevitable as are the growth of crops when the farmer buries seeds beneath the surface of the ground.

God also sends his curses upon the whole world because of its sinfulness, and to encourage them to repent and become faithful to him. And as the next passage in Revelation says, he will judge them when this world is over.

Another reason for the above passage in Revelation may be to warn us not to waste our time attempting to convert men who insist upon doing wrong and insist upon being filthy. Jesus gave this command to his apostles when he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick: **“And whoever will not receive you, nor hear your words,**

while departing that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matthew 10:14). He does not want us to waste our time attempting to convert souls who are unrepentant. For such unrepentant sinners we are to depart, and “shake off the dust” from our feet.

### Blessed are those who obey

- **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. Blessed are those doing his commandments, so that their right will be to the tree of life, and they may enter in the gates into the city** (Revelation 22:12-14).

Notice again that Jesus told John he was coming quickly to pass judgment on every man. And that was two thousand years ago. Notice also, he said he was going to render to each man according to his work. And he uttered a blessing for those doing his commandments. Notice again the emphasis upon obedience, not faith only.

The letters Alpha and Omega are the first and the last of the Greek alphabet. Since both the Father and the Son said they were the Alpha and the Omega, that may mean they are the origin of all things and they are the ultimate of all things. Both the Father and the Son also said they were the beginning and the end. Perhaps that means both the Father and the Son began the world, and they will end the world.

However, only the Son said he was the first and the last. What that probably means is that Jesus was the first son that was begotten from the Father, and he is the last son that will be begotten from the Father. He is the uniquely begotten Son, for there are no others like him, nor will there ever be. He is the first and the last. Moreover, God cannot be said to be first because first implies a beginning, and God had no beginning; he has always existed.

### Outside are the sinners

- **Outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every man who loves and makes a lie** (Revelation 22:15).

In the Bible the word dog sometimes symbolizes male prostitutes, men who are filthy perverts. Such men live like dogs, mounting any trashy woman who wants them. However, the use of the word dog in that passage may symbolize every kind of filthy pervert.

The last part of that passage means every man who lies and loves to do it. By loving to lie no doubt means loving to use any kind of deceit, which thing is natural to the devil and all who belong to him.

### Jesus sent the testimony

- **I, Jesus, have sent my agent to testify these things to you for the congregations** (Revelation 22:16).

Jesus said the testimony in this book is for the congregations. This book was specifically addressed to the seven congregations of Asia. However, like other books of the Bible that

were written for particular persons, their words contain lessons for all the disciples of Christ everywhere and at all times. And those who proclaim him are his ambassadors to testify to the rest of the world.

## The bright and morning star

- **I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star** (Revelation 22:16).

Before David sinned God promised him a never ending dynasty (see Second Samuel 7), and Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. He is the bright and morning star, because in another book John said about him, **“He was the true light coming into the world that enlightens every man”** (John 1:9).

He enlightens every man, but as John said in that same book, **“... 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). The words of Jesus enlighten every man, but most men reject his words and prefer the darkness of sin.

## He who will, let him come

- **And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he who hears, let him say, Come. And he who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely** (Revelation 22:17).

Since the Spirit (of God) invites anyone to come and drink of the water of life freely, that probably refers to the living water Jesus spoke about to the woman at the well (see John 4), the living water of his good news of our salvation. It is an invitation to accept the good news of Christ. Nevertheless, no man can drink of it unless he comes. And the only way to come is by believing and obeying Jesus Christ while still living upon the earth.

The bride (of the Lamb) also invites men to come. The bride is the new Jerusalem, and it beckons men to come there. It beckons them the way a beautiful woman beckons a man, by showing her attractiveness. And the attractiveness of the bride is described in this book of Revelation.

And he who hears also invites men to come. That means men who accept Christ urge other men to repent and receive his salvation. That desire to convert all men to Christ, all who are able, is expressed beautifully in another book by John. He began it by saying, **“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”** (First John 1:1-4).

Our joy is made full when men repent and come to Christ. For Jesus said, **“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”** (Luke 15:7). And we on the earth who love God rejoice with them.

## Adding or taking from the words

- **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).

That warning is not just for the book of Revelation, it is for the entire Bible. The books of the Bible were not gathered together until many years after Revelation was written. But I have no doubt that God knew this book would be placed at the end of the Bible when it was finally assembled.

And that warning should be taken very seriously, especially by men who translate the Bible and add their opinions to it as part of the translation. The sloppy method of translation, euphemistically called “dynamic equivalence,” is an example of adding to and taking away the words of the Bible, to make them more pleasing to men. The popular paraphrases are even worse offenders.

## I come quickly

- **He who testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Truly. Yea, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus is with all the sanctified. Truly** (Revelation 22:20-21).

Those are the last words in the book of Revelation. Three times in the last part of Revelation Jesus said, **“I come quickly.”** Although his words about coming quickly are not to be taken literally in our sense of time, nevertheless, he will come quickly in the consciousness of each one of us. And here is what I mean.

After the body of every disciple of Christ dies, the next thing he experiences consciously is Christ coming for him (or bringing him by his heavenly agents). After we die we will sleep until he calls us. When I die my spirit may sleep for a thousand years or more before he calls me and I awaken. However, I will have no awareness or memory of that thousand years or more while I sleep in death. A few years ago I underwent cryotherapy surgery for prostate cancer. The last thing I remember, as I was being wheeled on a table to the operating room, was having a mask put on my face. The next thing I remember was struggling to become fully awake in the recovery room. I was completely unconscious during the operation, and I have no memory of that passage of time.

Likewise will be the sleep of death. After my body dies I will immediately recognize him calling me. It will be immediate in my consciousness, regardless of how long I may sleep. For the sleep of death involves a complete loss of awareness. There will be no dreams or any such experiences in the sleep of death.

And that total unconsciousness in the sleep of death is true not just of me, but of every man. For the disciples of Christ, when we awoken from the sleep of death, we will see an agent sent by Jesus to call us. And since no man will have any consciousness of anything during his sleep of death, those experiences of the heavenly world will appear to be immediate in our consciousness after our body perishes. That may be another meaning of these words of Jesus: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any man keeps my word, he will, no, not see death, into the age”** (John 8:51). When our body perishes, we will truly not see death. Our spirits will simply sleep and then awaken when we are called to heaven.

Jesus will come quickly in that psychological sense for many of us. But Paul tells how he will come quickly in a literal sense for some others, because not all will experience the sleep of death. As Paul said, **“Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will actually not all sleep, but we will all be transformed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For it will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be transformed. For this perishable must put on imperishability, and this mortal put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on imperishability, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come to pass the saying that is written, Death was swallowed up in victory”** (First Corinthians 15:51-54).

Immediately after our body dies, our consciousness will experience him calling us, and we will be transformed **“in an instant, in the blink of an eye.”** That will happen whether we sleep in death, or are called immediately. But that marvelous transformation is only for his disciples, all who strive to become sons of God for eternity.

Paul also said these words about Jesus coming: **“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).

We should encourage each other with those words, because God knows that it is not easy trying to live righteously, with a body that wars against our spirit, in a world of tribulation in the bondage of corruption that is ruled by the devil and filled with evil spirits and evil creatures. Is not easy, but the reward he has for those who endure all the trials and temptations of this life, while loving and obeying him, is wonderful beyond what we could ever imagine. 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).

Therefore, dear brothers, hearken to Paul, and encourage each other with all those words. Rejoice and praise Almighty God our beloved heavenly Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because as long as we remain faithful to them we are destined to have life, and have it more abundantly in heaven as sons of God for eternity. For Jesus said about us, **“I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10). 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).

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## Epilogue

### Preserving the Word of God

#### *My Faith*

I thank God that I had parents who were Christians. And as far back as I can remember we accepted the Bible as a divine book written by God's Holy Spirit through the hands of men. Although there were a few things that I did not agree with my father and my mother about, faith in God, his Christ, and the Holy Bible was not any of them. For I am a man who loves truth no matter how unpopular it may be or how troubling it might appear. And the existence of God, the authenticity of his Christ, and the truthfulness of the Bible are too obvious for me to ever deny.

Although I have a Ph.D. in the field of psychology, and have been trained in scientific research, the more I have learned the stronger my faith in the Holy Scriptures has grown. You see, every man must have faith in something. Even this latter day atheistic world of science has a fundamental faith. For faith of some kind is the foundation of all knowledge and reason. Yes, science is based on faith; faith that there are laws of nature, and that these laws can be discovered. It was Christian Europe that gave birth to modern science because of faith in the God of the Bible, the God of law and order who created the world.

Thanks to my early education and my deep faith in God and his Bible, I have always retained my Christian identity and values. Yet after leaving my parents, while I was a young man I had slowly drifted away from church involvement. Then in the midst of my doctoral training I experienced some personal crises. As a reaction to those crises I became much more committed to Christ and his Church.

Having already seen so much wisdom in the Bible, and remembering such scriptures as Hebrews 4:12, which says, **“For the word of God is living, and potent, and sharper, above every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division both of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and discernible of the thoughts and intentions of the heart,”** I decided to spend the rest of my life striving to find more of that wisdom, and to share it with other men. Most of that effort during my teaching years was spent adding Biblical principles to the secular content of the courses I taught.

#### *Bible Translations*

Back in 1950, when I was a freshman in college, I purchased a copy of the Revised Standard Version New Testament (RSV). The following year I purchased the entire RSV Bible. I much preferred the RSV to the King James Version (KJV) because it was so much easier to read and understand. Yet in later years as I began to get more acquainted with the original Greek text I began to see how loosely the RSV was translated from the Greek. It was then that I began to develop a greater appreciation for the KJV in spite of its antiquated vocabulary.

Eventually, like so many others who are deeply involved with Bible study, I found myself dissatisfied to some degree with all of the translations of the Bible I have used or that I know about. Hence, I too decided to go back to its original languages. However, I limited

myself to the Greek of the New Testament. At first I simply used Berry's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, and Strong's dictionary of the Greek words included in that edition. I later added Thayer's lexicon, and a few other books such as Wigram's *The New Englishman's Greek Concordance and Lexicon*. I also studied a Greek grammar book. Nevertheless, I found myself often spending hours on a single verse. Moreover, with a few passages I was totally frustrated attempting to find what I considered to be the correct translation.

After my retirement from college teaching my son created a web site for me so that I might make available some of what I have learned about the Bible that I believe could be of help to other men. As I began to write more essays I found myself increasingly frustrated with having to quote from the translations I was using. So, sometime in 1997 I decided, since the KJV is public domain, to simply convert its archaic words to those of more contemporary English (I have later learned that other men had already done this).

In the meantime I also purchased a copy of BibleWorks software. This is a powerful program which provides tools very helpful for translation. Indeed, BibleWorks provides all of the parsing information for each Greek word in the New Testament. Learning the rules for parsing is perhaps the most difficult part of learning Greek. As I progressed in my word conversions of the KJV New Testament, I would check the wording with the Greek in BibleWorks. It was then that it became apparent to me that the KJV is far from being a literal translation. And there were many places where it, too, was loosely translated.

Hence, I decided to use BibleWorks to make my own translation. Since the American Standard Version is now also in the public domain, and I was told by most of my knowledgeable friends that it was the most accurate of them all, I decided to revise the ASV New Testament. I started with its text, then using the Greek parsing information supplied with BibleWorks I would make revisions as I judged best. It was a great challenge for a man who has never been formally trained in the Greek language. I also purchased several more books and a software tutor to help me learn the language.

During this time I began to search the Internet for material about translation. The Internet has been another great blessing in this regard. It was there that I began to learn about the differences in Bible manuscripts, and some of the controversies about the text of the Greek New Testament itself. I learned that there is division of opinion about where the authentic words of the Greek New Testament are found. For the ASV was translated primarily from one group of Greek manuscripts, and the KJV from another. So for several weeks I stopped translating, and began researching those issues. This essay is a summary of what I found.

### *The Goal of this Essay*

My brothers, I am neither a biologist nor a paleontologist, but I certainly have both the right and the duty to evaluate the theory of evolution—a theory that explains the origin of life in contradiction to the Bible. And remember, most of the Jews of Jesus' day were not scribes and scholars, but they certainly had both the right and the duty to evaluate his teachings in light of what they knew about the Holy Scriptures. In the same way, most of us are not Greek scholars, but we are literate, educated men who have both the right and the duty to evaluate and choose what we consider to be the true words of Holy Scripture.

This essay is only a brief overview of the issues involved in the quest for the original words of the New Testament, for many books have been written. As with any overview most of the detail was left out. I tried to take what I considered to be the essential elements of the subject without encumbering it with a lot of detail.

My goal in writing this essay was to present the basic facts of the matter, and to evaluate them from my perspective as a believer in Christ so as both to inform and to strengthen the faith of my Christian brothers. Modern establishment scholars condemn any such commitment to our faith. They call it a prejudicial agenda. I have found most of them to be either unbelievers or pseudo-believers who close their minds to anything but their own glorified skepticism.

### *Greek New Testament Manuscripts*

All documents created before the invention of printing were, of course, hand written. And before the invention of paper the Holy Scriptures were written on either papyrus or parchment. The New Testament books had their origin in the 1st century A.D., but many thousands of copies have been made. In addition to the original manuscripts (called autographs), most of the ancient copies no longer exist. Indeed, at the beginning of the 4th century Emperor Diocletian began a great persecution against the Church of Christ, which included an edict to destroy all of the scriptures.

The oldest surviving manuscripts are all of papyrus, a relatively inexpensive material. Papyrus is made of stalks of the papyrus plant. The stalks were cut into strips and laid out side by side in two layers with one layer perpendicular to the other. Then they were pressed together and allowed to dry. This bonded them together into a flat sheet that was convenient for writing. Sheets could be bonded to each other to form long strips for scrolls, but Christians wrote on both sides and assembled the sheets together into a codex, or book. Many scholars believe that Christians invented the book form of written material. For the codex was unknown before the Church, and most secular writing continued to be on scrolls for several centuries even afterward.

By the 4th century parchment began to be used more frequently. Parchment is far more durable than papyrus, but also much more expensive. It was usually made of stretched sheepskins or goatskins. Vellum is a higher quality parchment made of kid, lamb, or antelope skins. According to the Alands (1989 pg 77),

One sheep or goat could provide only two double folios, i.e., only four folios of the finished manuscript, the size of which would be determined by the size of the animal. A manuscript containing a group of New Testament writings in the average format (about 200-250 folios of approximately 25 X 19 cm.) required the hides of at least fifty to sixty sheep or goats.

Hence, not only did the cost involve months of labor of a skilled scribe, but also the skins of a large herd of animals. Paper did not begin to be used for Bible manuscripts until the 12th century.

The form of the text of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament is also very different from modern writing. Edward Miller (1886 pg 105) described it as follows:

Uncial Manuscripts were originally made up of continuous writing in large letters without any space between the words or sentences. The most ancient letters were upright and square: afterwards they became narrow, or oblong, or leaning; and the writing gradually assumed a more elaborate and artistic form.

Moreover, there were no punctuation marks of any kind. Such writing is called “uncial.” This form of text is simply strings of capital letters broken only at the end of each line. Cursive writing did not begin until about the 9th century. Such writing is called “minuscule.”

However, technical terminology for classifying manuscripts has developed which can be confusing. According to modern jargon, all manuscripts written on papyrus are called “papyrus” whether in uncial or minuscule letters. Non-papyrus manuscripts are designated by the kind of letters used: uncial or minuscule. Hence, this makes three classes of manuscripts: papyrus, uncial, and minuscule. Lectionaries are also manuscripts of the New Testament, but they are classified differently because their text is non-continuous, being segments of scripture that were used for liturgical purposes. Some lectionaries have uncial text, but most have minuscule.

The original manuscripts of the books of the Bible have all disappeared. Nevertheless, over the centuries copies continued to be made, not only to spread the word, but also to replace manuscripts as they wore away or were destroyed by enemies. Some of those old hand written documents continue to be discovered from time to time. Most of the surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts have been microfilmed and are stored at the Institute for New Testament Textual Research at the University of Munster in Germany under the direction of Kurt and Barbara Aland.

However, the Alands (1989 pg 74-75) report that “...a great many manuscripts have been irretrievably lost in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through wars and their consequences, and through natural disasters.” Nevertheless, they report that currently there are known to be over 5000 surviving manuscripts of the New Testament, although they vary in degrees of completeness.

For example, only 60 manuscripts have all of the books of the New Testament (3 uncials and 57 minuscules), but only one still has all of the text. There are 149 that have all but the book of Revelation (2 uncials and 147 minuscules). There are 2123 manuscripts that have only the four biographies of Jesus (43 papyri 284 uncials and 1896 minuscules). There are 273 that have only Acts, Paul’s letters, and the letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude (8 uncials and 265 minuscules). There are 220 that only have Paul’s letters (26 papyri 56 uncials and 138 minuscules). According to the Alands, there are a total of 2361 manuscripts containing the biographies of Jesus, 792 containing Paul’s letters, 287 containing Revelation, and 662 containing the remaining letters. Some manuscripts are mere fragments.

These surviving manuscripts vary in age from the second century to the 16th century, just after printing began. The most famous are the 4th century manuscripts Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Codex Sinaiticus contains the New Testament and most of the Old Testament as well as the epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. Codex Vaticanus has extensive coverage of both the New Testament and the Old Testament. There are 46 other manuscripts dated before the 5th century. The oldest is a papyrus fragment

about 2.5 by 3.5 inches in size dated about A.D. 125 containing a few words of John 18. There are 210 manuscripts from the 5th century to the 8th century. Hence, about 95 percent of the surviving manuscripts are no older than the 8th century. All of the earliest manuscripts, both papyrus and parchment, come from Egypt, just as the most ancient corpses and other perishable things have been found there, since its hot dry climate is less conducive to decay.

When reading about these manuscripts, it will help you to know something about how they have been coded. Each papyrus manuscript is assigned a number preceded by the letter “p”. The coding of uncials began with Greek letters, and then as the list grew Roman letters were added. One uncial is coded with the first Hebrew letter, Aleph. The uncials are also assigned numbers, all beginning with a zero. Minuscules are assigned numbers only. Lectionaries are given numbers with an “l” in front of them.

### *Comparing the Text of the Surviving Manuscripts*

One of the greatest problems of identifying the original text of the New Testament is that none of the manuscripts for the different books read exactly the same. No two of them agree with *every* word. The Spirit of God guided the hands of the authors, but not those of all the men who later copied what they wrote. In his great wisdom God requires us to struggle for truth against the many forces that work to obscure it, just as it is a never-ending struggle to remove weeds from a garden and dust from a house.

Since hand copying large amounts of text is a very laborious task, without divine intervention errors of some kind are virtually unavoidable. As one copyist of long ago was quoted saying, “Three fingers hold the pen, but the whole body labors.” And so, all of the manuscripts vary in their text to some degree. Nevertheless, faithful Christian men have continually sought both to prevent and to remove errors of copying. For just as men have created clever signal detection and enhancement devices to correct for modern transmission errors, so faithful men through the centuries worked to preserve the Holy Scriptures using (and continuing to use) their intelligence to correct for errors.

Hence, we can have confidence that the Scriptures have been accurately preserved. For the great majority of the surviving manuscripts contain very few differences, and most of those involve minor things such as differences in spelling and word order—things that are insignificant to the content of the information. For example, some manuscripts differ in the spelling of David’s name. Some use the letter beta in its spelling, while others use the letter upsilon: DABID versus DAUID. Another example involves how the words “Jesus” and “Christ” are paired together. Some manuscripts have “Jesus Christ,” while others have “Christ Jesus.”

Such differences are trivial to its content. Otherwise how could the Bible be translated into languages that have a different alphabet and different rules of syntax? I think it is providential that all of the Old Testament quotations contained in the New Testament are from the Septuagint (a Greek translation made from the original Hebrew text about two centuries before Christ), thus giving God’s approval for translating the Holy Scriptures into other languages, where potential for inaccuracy is much greater. For all scholars agree that differences in translations far exceed differences in manuscripts.

Reported estimates of several hundred thousand differences among all the manuscripts are very deceptive. Since David's name occurs 15 times in Matthew's biography of Jesus, a single letter difference in the spelling of his name would be counted as 15 differences between two manuscripts of that book. Since 2361 manuscripts contain Matthew, if half of them used a different letter from the other half, then 15 times half of 2361 would produce about 17,700 so-called "differences" in Matthew alone, when in fact it involves but one letter difference in the spelling of one word.

To my knowledge an exact count and comparison of every kind of difference among the 5000 manuscripts has yet to be made. Collating and comparing so many documents is a formidable task—as the Alands have reported. But they did speak of recent efforts (reported in 1987) they have made using modern information processing techniques (pg 318):

This new tool has been developed on the corpus of the Catholic letters [those of James, Peter, John, and Jude], but in principle it is equally useful for each of the New Testament scriptures. In the present application all existing manuscripts of the Catholic letters were considered. There were 540, more than could possibly be examined by any of the traditional methods of textual criticism. This tool, or rather this method for evaluating all the manuscripts of the New Testament corpus, is based on a series of test passages. These short units have been carefully selected and are spread over the complete range of a book (or a corpus) of scripture like a net . . . . Glancing through the list of test passages and collations also makes it obvious that the profusion of data represented cannot be managed or effectively arranged for evaluation without the aid of data processing. Taking any one manuscript through all the test passages would require a great amount of time.

The results of their analysis confirm the fact that the overall differences in the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts are very small. For they said (pg 321),

The picture we gain from this randomly selected test passage recurs elsewhere almost consistently: the overwhelming majority of manuscripts support *one* reading . . . always the same . . . These manuscripts are essentially mere copies, repeating the same text with only minor variation . . . [There is a] high degree of uniformity which characterizes [the majority of the manuscripts] (with frequently 100 percent agreement among manuscripts!) . . . .

### *The Few Deviant Manuscripts*

Nevertheless, there is a tiny minority of manuscripts with some significant differences. Men have attempted to classify these deviant manuscripts into various "types" because there is such variation among them. I have no faith in such schemes because various proposed "types" have come and gone. The only thing certain is that there is a great majority of unified manuscripts, and a tiny minority of manuscripts that not only deviate to some extent from the majority, but also differ from themselves.

Most of the deviant manuscripts come from Egypt. And they are almost always older copies that most likely owe their survival to the inferiority of their text, having been put away and not used. The two most famous ancient manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus (coded Aleph or 01) and Codex Vaticanus (coded Beta or 03), are examples of this very thing. Dean

John Burgon was a renowned 19th century Greek scholar in England (see [www.deanburgon-society.org](http://www.deanburgon-society.org)). He said about them (1896 pg 25),

It will be found in the end that we have been guilty of no exaggeration in characterizing B, [Aleph], and D at the outset, as three of the most corrupt copies in existence. Let not any one suppose that the age of these five MSS. [Aleph, A, B, C, D] places them upon a pedestal higher than all others. They can be proved to be wrong time and time by evidence of an earlier period than that which they can boast.

Further on he added (pg 33),

... these Codexes abound with so much licentiousness or carelessness as to suggest the inference, that they are in fact indebted for their preservation to their hopeless character. Thus it would appear that an evil reputation ensured their neglect in ancient times; and has procured that they should survive to our own, long after multitudes which were much better had perished in the master's service.

The Alands compared the text of the unified majority of manuscripts with the text of the remnants. (The unified majority is sometimes called "Byzantine" because that region of the Roman Empire is where Paul did most of his work, and it was where the Church first grew strong.) The following is how they described their results (1989 pg 323):

This illustrates what we noticed above in our first example of test passage collations: the greatest number of manuscripts, comprising the bloc of Majority text witnesses in most instances, are always the same—they are manuscripts with a Byzantine text. The representatives of this text type are extremely homogeneous, exhibiting a high ratio of agreement among themselves. For manuscripts with the fewest Majority [text] readings, that is, most of the early manuscripts, exactly the opposite is true. Even the most closely related among them generally show agreement ratios of between 60 and 70 percent. This is clearly illustrated by the great uncials from 01 to 04

Notice what they said about the deviant manuscripts; that is, the ones "... with the fewest Majority [text] readings." They said, "Even the most closely related among them generally show agreement ratios between 60 and 70 percent." That means that the texts of even the most unified of those deviant documents disagree with each other about one third of the time. And they went on to say that those manuscripts with this great disparity of text include the famous codices Sinaiticus (01) and Vaticanus (03).

### *Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus*

The great Roman emperor Constantine may have been indirectly responsible for the paradox of those two codices: their magnificent physical quality but inferior textual quality. Constantine in the early 4th century was the Roman emperor who first legalized and supported the Church of Christ. And as part of his support he promoted the use of the Bible. Miller (1886 pgs 81-82) describes one famous order he gave:

Constantine ... gave the celebrated order to Eusebius, probably between A.D. 330 and 340, to send him fifty magnificent copies of the Holy Scriptures. They were to be written on the best vellum by skilful and accomplished penmen, and in a form well fitted for use. Orders were at the same time issued to the Governor of the province to supply the materials for the work, which was to be accomplished with all possible speed. Two

carriages were placed at the disposal of Eusebius for conveying the copies to Constantinople, and he sent them off soon under the charge of a deacon. Now there are reasons for supposing that B [Vaticanus] and [Aleph or Sinaiticus] were amongst these fifty manuscripts. They are referred by the best judges to about the period of Constantine's letter, to speak generally. In Tischendorf's opinion, which is confirmed by Dr. Scrivener, the scribe of B wrote six 'conjugate leaves' of [Aleph]. These manuscripts are unrivalled for the beauty of their vellum and for their other grandeur, and are just what we should expect to find amongst such as would be supplied in obedience to an imperial command, and executed with the aid of imperial resources.

Although they are "... unrivalled for the beauty of their vellum and for their other grandeur," not so the text itself, for Miller (pgs 82-83) went on to say,

They abound in omissions, and show marks of such carelessness as would attend an order carried out with more than ordinary expedition. And even the corrector, who always followed the copyist, did his work with similar carelessness to the scribe whom he was following.

Metzger (1968 pgs 47-48) also reports the same theory of origin, saying,

... some scholars believe that these two manuscripts were originally among the fifty copies of the Scriptures which the Emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius to have written. Indeed, T. C. Skeat of the British Museum has suggested to the present writer that codex Vaticanus was a 'reject' among the fifty copies, for it is deficient in the Eusebian canon tables, has many corrections by different scribes, and, as was mentioned above lacks the books of Maccabees apparently through an oversight.

Dean Burgon studied ancient manuscripts extensively. Indeed, his sixteen folio volumes of scripture quotations contained in the writings of the ancient Church patriarchs are housed in the British museum. He likewise judged the so-called "great uncials" including Sinaiticus and Vaticanus to be remnants of manuscripts rejected because of their textual inferiority. Astonished at their modern popularity, he asked (1896 pg 36),

Do men indeed find it impossible to realize the notion that there must have existed such things as refuse copies in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries as well as in the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh? and that the Codexes which we call B [Aleph] C D may possibly, if not as I hold probably, have been of that class?

### *Printing the New Testament*

According to historians the time from about A.D. 1300 to A.D. 1500 was a time of great ferment in Europe marking the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Modern humanism within the cultural elite began to develop early in the 1300's (historians call that period the "renaissance"). Also during that period there were many wars and natural disasters. The most devastating of which was the great bubonic plague called the Black Death, which occurred during the years 1347 to 1352. It caused the death of 25 percent of the population of Europe.

Strife and moral corruption within the Roman Catholic Church also gave birth to the Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 1500's. No doubt the development of the printing press, and the consequent greater availability of the Bible helped make it succeed.

It was the Bible that revealed to Martin Luther how far the practices of the Roman Catholic system had deviated from the original good news of Christ. This helped encourage the Protestants to revolt away from the spiritual authority of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to the Holy Scriptures, and to proclaim their slogan, “sola scriptura,” which is Latin for “only scripture.”

Until that time Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation (A.D. 405) was the only authorized Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. And so there developed a desire for more copies of the original Greek New Testament. One of the first books ever printed was the famous Bible of Johann Gutenberg in Germany at some time around 1450. But that book was from the Latin Vulgate. It was not until 1516 that a Greek New Testament was published. It was edited by the Catholic humanist, Desiderius Erasmus. His edition included a Latin translation, and was printed in Basel, Switzerland.

However, it seems the Roman Catholic Cardinal Ximenes of Spain actually had the Greek New Testament printed two years earlier, but it was not published until 1520, after Vatican approval, when the entire Bible was published. It was called the Complutensian Polyglot, because it consisted of the Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts in parallel columns with the Greek. Although different manuscripts were used, the Greek text differed very little from that of Erasmus’ editions.

Erasmus relied on about a half dozen (the exact number is debated) Greek manuscripts of the New Testament for his printed edition. He also inserted a few verses translated from the Latin Vulgate. Erasmus eventually produced five editions, making corrections and changes each time. But it was not until the third edition that he inserted the controversial words in First John 5:7 about the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit being one. He did not have them in his first editions because they were not in the Greek manuscripts he used. Having been criticized by some because of that, he promised to include the words in the next edition, but only if a manuscript could be found containing them. Eventually a paper copy was “found.” But it is almost certain that it was written for the expressed purpose of satisfying his demand. For scholars date the age of that manuscript in the same century that Erasmus did his work.

The editions of the Greek New Testament assembled by Erasmus were a good beginning. But other editions of better quality were later produced based upon more manuscripts. For example, Robert Estienne (also called Stephanus or Stephen) published four editions in France from 1546 to 1551. It was Stephanus who first introduced verse numbers into the text. Another well known editor was Theodore Beza (the successor of John Calvin in Geneva) who produced nine editions of a Greek New Testament from 1565 to 1598. However, his did not differ much from the text of Stephanus.

It was the two brothers Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir (publishers in the Netherlands) who popularized the expression “Textus Receptus,” or “Received Text.” They published seven editions of a Greek New Testament from 1624 to 1678, which was very similar to that of Stephanus and Beza. In the preface to their second edition they wrote Latin words to the effect that all errors had been corrected, and the text was the “textum ab omnibus receptum,” meaning, the text received by all. This expression “Textus Receptus” became so popular that it now refers to every edition of the Greek New Testament based upon the

text of the great majority of the manuscripts, which, remember, the Alands said were, "... essentially mere copies, repeating the same text with only minor variation ..."

Regarding the various editions of the *Textus Receptus*, the scholar George Ricker Berry (1897) noted a century ago that they are, "... in the main one and the same; and [any] of them may be referred to as the *Textus Receptus*." More recently G. W. Anderson (1999) of the Trinitarian Bible Society (see [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)) said, "There were approximately thirty distinct editions of the *Textus Receptus* made over the years. Each differs slightly from the others ... These variations include spelling, accents and breathing marks, word order and other minor kinds of differences."

Regarding the most famous early editions, he said, "The editions of Stephens, Beza and the Elzevirs all present substantially the same text, and the variations are not of great significance and rarely affect the sense." In the late 19th century, because of uncertainty about the exact Greek text from which came the very popular King James Version, F.H.A. Scrivener edited a new text (published posthumously in 1894) which he believed most closely underlay the KJV. Regarding Scrivener's edition, Anderson said, "There are 283 differences between the Scrivener text and the Stephanus 1550. These differences are minor, and pale into insignificance when compared with the approximately 6,000 differences—many of which are quite substantial—between the [text of the remnants] and the *Textus Receptus*."

## *Translations*

The Protestant Reformation also generated a great desire for translations of the Bible into native languages. Men of that time were hungry for the Word of God. Martin Luther was the first to translate the Greek New Testament into German. He used Erasmus' edition, and published in 1522. The 14th century English priest John Wycliffe was a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. He opposed many of the erroneous practices of the Catholic Church, and claimed that the Bible was the authority for Christian beliefs.

He was the first to translate the New Testament into English (about 1382). But he translated from the Latin Vulgate, and, of course, it was in manuscript form because printing was not yet available. He was persecuted but managed to survive with the help of the Royal family, although his followers began to be severely persecuted not long after his death.

William Tyndale was the first to translate the Hebrew and Greek texts into English for publication beginning in 1525 (he never completed the Old Testament). Because of opposition in England he had to go to Germany to have them printed. And then they had to be smuggled into England. He also used Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament. Tyndale was finally burned at the stake in Belgium for his efforts. However, not long after his martyrdom English translations were finally accepted officially in England.

In order to standardize the text of the English Bible, in 1604 King James authorized a committee of about 50 scholars to develop a new version, which has come to be known as the Authorized Version (AV) or King James Version. It was first published in 1611. For the Greek New Testament the committee relied on the Beza edition of 1598, in addition to the Stephens 1550 and 1551 editions. They also relied heavily upon the translations of William Tyndale and other editions of the English Bible.

Many other lesser known translations were made from the traditional Textus Receptus family. Examples of these are the 19th century versions of Noah Webster and Robert Young, and two more recent ones by Jay Green. In 1982 Thomas Nelson published what they called “The New King James Version.” Its New Testament version is based primarily upon the Majority Text Greek edition of Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad (1985).

### *The Rise of Textual Critics*

The book of Psalms begins with these words: **“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and on his law he meditates day and night”** (Psalm 1:1-2). God warns against heeding the counsel of wicked men, fraternizing with sinners, and joining scoffers. Scoffers are men who sow seeds of doubt about truth and righteousness. Since the word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) it was to be expected when the Bible became widely available and commonly read that scoffers would arise who would promote doubts about its words.

Hence, among modern scholars there has developed a movement called “Biblical Criticism” which is dominated by Bible skeptics. There are two general divisions: interpretive (higher) criticism and textual (lower) criticism. Like latter day scientists these Bible scholars are committed to a secular mentality. The fruits of interpretive criticism have led to doubts about anything divine in the Bible, including such things as the virgin birth, the historical reality of Moses, and Jesus’ resurrection. Such scholars at the recent Jesus Seminar series concluded that only about 20 percent of Jesus’ words quoted in the New Testament are authentic—a conclusion based entirely upon their own subjective judgment. Textual criticism is most relevant to this essay. Men of that field claim to seek the original words of the books of the Bible. But after reading much of their work, I agree with D. A. Thompson (1971) who said,

As Darwin’s work undermined the belief of many in the biblical doctrine of direct creation, so Westcott and Hort’s theories [19th century textual critics] have led to the disparagement of the Textus Receptus and the craze for a new Greek text and fresh translations of the Bible. As Darwin’s followers generally ignore the objections to the theory of evolution, so the new textual critics never attempt to answer the classic works of a scholar like Dean Burgon in defence of the Reformation text. As evolutionists have captured most of the key positions in the universities, colleges and schools, it has become common to exclude those who still believe in the Genesis account of creation from teaching positions, and to regard them as behind the times. Very often those who from deep conviction uphold the traditional text and the Authorized Version of the Bible, are considered a nuisance and incomprehensible cranks.

The following are some example of how these men think. Now, the epistle of First Peter begins this way: **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the chosen who are sojourners of the Dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ...”** The epistle of Second Peter begins this way: **“Simon Peter, a bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received an equally precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

But the Alands (1989 pg 49) claim the author of one of them is a liar, saying, “1 Peter and 2 Peter were clearly written by two different authors for completely different occasions, and were brought together only by a much later church tradition.” Indeed, they scoff at the idea that the New Testament was inspired by God when they say (pg 6), “This idea of verbal inspiration (i.e., of the literal and inerrant inspiration of the text), which the orthodoxy of both Protestant traditions maintained so vigorously . . .” In contrast to what they believe, the apostle 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).

Regarding the confusion in some of the deviant manuscripts about who was the first husband of Herodias, Bruce Metzger, another one of their champions, says (1993 pg 29), “It appears, therefore, that either Josephus failed to give the full name of Herodias’s first husband (Herod Philip), or Mark confused Herodias’s husband and son-in-law.” Thus he gives the words of the Mark’s biography of Jesus no more credibility than the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus. Another skeptic of their kind (Finegan 1974 pg 54) wrote the following: “If the author [of the original text] wrote it himself, he could have made mistakes; if he dictated it to a scribe, the latter could have made mistakes.”

These men not only deny the divinity of the New Testament, but they also have contempt for the great majority of the New Testament Greek manuscripts upon which the Textus Receptus and the KJV are based. Regarding those manuscripts, the Alands (1989) say they are “irrelevant for establishing the original text.” The Alands’ claim that wherever those words are found they have caused “corrosive effects” on what they call the “normal” text. Bruce Metzger frequently used the following words regarding the great majority of the New Testament Greek manuscripts: “debased,” “corrupt,” “inferior,” “disfigured.”

The 19th century scholars B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort are commonly cited as being most responsible for turning the world of Bible scholars away from the traditional Textus Receptus and the KJV. Regarding the traditional Textus Receptus they judged it to be (1895 pg 134), “... appreciably impoverished in sense and force, more fitted for cursory perusal or recitation than for repeated and diligent study,” thus casting great doubt on the reliability of the KJV. Hort was known to have been very hostile to the Textus Receptus early in his life, for in 1851 at the age of 23 (as reported in 1896 by his son, Arthur) he wrote to a friend, saying, “I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus ... Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late manuscripts; it is a blessing there are such early ones.”

What Hort was referring to by “early ones” was the tiny minority of error laden ancient manuscripts that had managed to survive because they were stored away and unused—the remnants and the rejects. A few critics beginning as far back as the 17th century had found such manuscripts, and began to publish works showing how much they differed from the great majority. Some of those early critics edited Greek New Testaments of their own, and included what they call a “critical apparatus.” This so called “apparatus” is intended to show how the text differs among manuscripts. The idea is to describe each difference, as well as list the manuscripts (by code) with other evidence (e.g., from ancient versions and the writings of Church patriarchs) that support each one. Commonly, this information

about “variant readings” is included as a set of footnotes at the bottom of each page of the text of the New Testament edition.

The trouble is, the critical apparatuses of their editions, even the most recent ones, do not include the vast majority of the existing manuscripts. In fact, if they tried to list them all it would increase the size of their text to many volumes. So instead they lump them together with a symbol like “byz” and treat them as a single manuscript. It is like a judge being informed about witnesses. Suppose several thousand men from New England testify that the accused is innocent, while the southern men Bill, Henry, Fred, and Charles testify that he is guilty. The sly prosecutor, wanting to strengthen his very weak case, classifies the several thousand New England witnesses into a group called “Yank.” Then he gives the judge a list of the witnesses and their testimony as follows: against the defendant, Bill Henry Fred and Charles; for the defendant, Yank.

When the critics use the expression “the great mass of the manuscripts” in their critical apparatuses, they are not referring to the thousands of unified Byzantine manuscripts, but rather to (at most) a few dozen of the remnants. Kilpatrick (1978 pg 8-9) describes their deceptive claims this way:

The criterion which seems to count for most with the editors [of the UBS/NA text based on the old remnant manuscripts] is best described in their words “the weight of the external evidence” ... Certain of the phrases used in describing external evidence are particularly significant: “the great mass of the manuscripts” ... “the overwhelming evidence” ... “overwhelmingly supported” ... “the overwhelming weight of the testimony” ... “overwhelming testimony” ... “the overwhelming weight of evidence.” ... To judge from appearances, while they are prepared to be swayed by the great mass of manuscripts, they are not prepared to let themselves be swayed by the great mass of Byzantine manuscripts, as they would call them. Their use of the symbol Byz, whose representatives they do not detail, enables them to avoid giving in full the long lists of those witnesses and often permits the reader to form the impression that the reading of their choice is that of the great mass of manuscripts, whereas it may sometimes be the reading only of the great mass of non-Byzantine manuscripts.

The movement to undermine faith in the traditional Textus Receptus and the KJV became more vigorous in the early 19th century both in Germany and England. Indeed, according to the Alands (1989 pg 11), a German scholar of classical literature named Karl Lachmann, “...initiated a campaign against the Textus Receptus. His slogan: ‘Down with the late text of the Textus Receptus, and back to the text of the early fourth-century church!’ This slogan set the goal for the generations following.” That period in history was a time of intense searching for more of the ancient remnants.

One of the most successful of those men was the German Constantin von Tischendorf. He discovered twenty-one of the old rejected manuscripts, but the most famous was the Codex Sinaiticus. It had been in the possession of Monks at St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai among other ancient manuscripts there. Tischendorf has been criticized for how he got their manuscripts from them. He claimed they were about to destroy them (if you can believe that, after over a thousand years of possession) when he got there and rescued them.

From his description what he apparently first saw was the Monks about to burn pages from an ancient copy of the Septuagint. Here is what Tischendorf said about that:

I perceived in the middle of the great hall a large and wide basket full of old parchments; and the librarian, who was a man of information, told me that two heaps of papers like these mouldered by time, had been already committed to the flames. What was my surprise to find amid this heap of papers a considerable number of sheets of a copy of the Old Testament in Greek, which seemed to me to be one of the most ancient that I had ever seen (from Bentley, 1985, pg 86).

Tischendorf apparently used that to justify taking the Codex Sinaiticus from them. For according to Elliott and Moir (1974 pg 16) many people are "... aware of the somewhat underhanded way in which Tischendorf persuaded the monks of St Catherine's to part with their manuscript."

Here are some comments from the internet encyclopedia Wikipedia about how Tischendorf got the manuscript:

... Tischendorf was accused of buying manuscripts from ignorant monastery librarians at low prices. Indeed he was never rich, but he staunchly defended the rights of the monks at St. Catherine's Monastery when he persuaded them eventually to send the manuscript to the Tsar. Even so, the monks of Mt. Sinai still display a letter from Tischendorf promising to return the manuscript to them. In 1869 the tsar awarded him the style of "von" Tischendorf as a Russian noble. Thus the Codex found its way to the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg. In 1933, the Soviet Government sold the Codex Sinaiticus for 100,000 pounds to the British Museum in London, England.

As Wikipedia said, "... the monks of Mt. Sinai still display a letter from Tischendorf promising to return the manuscript to them."

Tischendorf was also criticized for coding Codex Sinaiticus with the Hebrew letter, Aleph. It was his way of placing it at the head of the list.

Tischendorf also edited a Greek New Testament of his own based heavily upon his beloved Codex Sinaiticus. But it was the work of Westcott and Hort that gained the most attention. For those two men could be called the Charles Darwins of Biblical Criticism. They developed an elaborate theory that explained to the satisfaction of the scholarly world why the great majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts that the Christian world relied on were "corrupted." Hence, as Borland (1987 pg 46) wrote, "With minor changes it was adopted by the scholarly world and has been *the* guiding theory for the past century."

In brief, they first grouped the manuscripts into "types." Although they did not originate this idea, it enabled them to compensate for the overwhelming number of manuscripts that testified against the few they preferred. Thus, they reduced the several thousand they opposed to but one type, which they said was based on a single 4th century recension. Supposedly, this (in their words) "smooth" but "disfigured" version was chosen by church leaders at Antioch in Syria who then foisted it upon the majority of the churches, hence, explaining why it became dominant. This claim of an official 4th century recension of the text was what made their theory popular. It was a bold way of explaining away the vast

majority of almost identical manuscripts, which the Christian world had accepted as having come from the autographs.

But as with the theory of evolution, they offered no proof, only speculation, and no proof has ever been found. Indeed, only a few years after they announced their theory, Dean Burgon (1896 pg 2) wrote these words: “The argument advanced by Dr. Hort that the Traditional Text was a new Text formed by successive recensions has been refuted upon examination of the verdict of the Fathers in the first four centuries, and of the early Syriac and Latin Versions.”

Yet the enemies of the Textus Receptus and the KJV still cling to the idea that the great majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts are the result of a 4th century recension imposed upon the Christian world. Like supporters of biological evolution, they have contrived lots of complex theories, and made many bold but unsubstantiated claims. Of course, they weave many facts among their theories to make them more persuasive. But, dear brothers, my advice is to filter out the facts, then reason for yourselves what they mean.

To promote their theory Westcott and Holt made other bold claims, and even the Alands (1989 pg 18) were critical of some of them. For they said:

... neither Westcott nor Holt ever actually collated a single manuscript but worked completely from published material, i.e., critical editions (viz., Tischendorf). This makes the claim in the first sentence of their appendix a trifle puzzling, that “the text of this edition of the New Testament has been formed exclusively on documentary evidence, no account being taken of any printed edition.

Nevertheless, just as Darwin turned the hearts of most scientists away from belief in the Bible description of creation, so also Westcott and Hort turned the hearts of most Bible scholars away from the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, and the KJV based upon them. Westcott and Hort also published their own edition of the Greek New Testament based heavily upon the previously ignored 4th century manuscript Codex Vaticanus. Ironically, neither the Greek New Testament edition of those two British scholars, nor the one by the German scholar Tischendorf prevailed. It was their combination by another German, Eberhard Nestle that eventually became widely accepted.

Since Tischendorf was partial to Codex Sinaiticus, and Westcott and Hort were partial to Codex Vaticanus, Nestle developed an edition composed of both. He chose every text that the editions of Westcott/Hort and Tischendorf agreed upon, and where they differed he consulted another text for the deciding vote.

Thus he published in 1898 a hybrid text that satisfied the world of modern Bible scholars; men who now scoff at the great number of New Testament manuscripts from which the Textus Receptus and the KJV were made. Nestle’s son, Erwin, later added a more detailed “critical apparatus.” In 1950 Kurt Aland became associated with the work. It now has his name also on the title page, and is commonly referred to as the Nestle-Aland text. That text is now in its 27th edition.

In 1955 the American Bible Society and several other Bible societies began cooperating on an edition of the Greek New Testament that was to be, in their words (Aland et al. 1993

viii), “specifically adapted to the requirements of Bible translators.” Reporting about the first edition, the Alands (1989 pg 69) said,

In 1966 there was published simultaneously in New York by the American Bible Society, in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society, in Edinburgh by the National Bible Society of Scotland, in Amsterdam by the Netherlands Bible Society, and in Stuttgart by the Wurttemberg Bible Society, *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren.

It is now called the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies, which they proudly abbreviate “GNT.” Its Greek text is identical to that of the Nestle-Aland. The two editions differ only in the format and composition of the “apparatus.” And now this text of the Greek New Testament created by Bible critics has, according to the Alands (1989 pg 20), “... achieved a position of absolute preeminence comparable only to that of the Textus Receptus in earlier centuries ...” It has become, in the words of Kilpatrick (1978), “A Textus Receptus Redivivus.” It has also been called the “Modern Textus Receptus,” for it is the text which is now “received by all,” meaning the great majority of modern scholars.

### *The Reasoning of the Critics*

Robertson and Pierpont (1991 pg xx) provide a good summary of the diverse approaches taken by different critics, saying they have,

... a preference for early witnesses (as espoused by Lachmann, Tregelles or Aland); a partiality for a favorite document (as demonstrated by Tischendorf or Westcott and Hort); a “reasoned” eclectic approach (as advocated by Metzger and Fee); and a “rigorous” eclectic approach (as argued for by Kilpatrick and Elliott).

Then they give their evaluation of these positions:

The weakness of each of those positions is the *subjective* preference for either a specific manuscript and its textual allies, for a tiny group of early manuscripts, and/or for certain types of “internal evidence” [meaning, judgment based on rules they created] regarding a reading’s length, difficulty, style, or contextual considerations.

The “rules” these modern critics created for themselves were obviously crafted to favor the deviant manuscripts. And the reasoning they use to justify them disparages both the original text of the New Testament and the scribes of old who labored to maintain and perpetuate its integrity. The following words illustrate the kind of rationale they use to justify their “rules” for selection (Metzger 1991 pg 13):

The characteristic of most scribal emendations is their superficiality, often combining “the appearance of improvement with the absence of its reality” [a quotation from Westcott and Hort] ... The scribe may have omitted material that was deemed to be (i) superfluous, (ii) harsh, or (iii) contrary to pious belief, liturgical usage, or ascetical practice ... scribes would frequently bring divergent passages into harmony with one another, in parallel passages (whether quotations from the Old Testament or different accounts or in the Gospels of the same event or narrative) ... Scribes would sometimes (a) Replace an unfamiliar word with a more familiar synonym; (b) Alter a less refined grammatical form or less elegant lexical expression...or (c) Add pronouns, conjunctions, and expletives to make a smoother text.

Such deliberate alterations of the text did occur in ancient times and is well documented. But it was rare, and faithful Christians were very vigilant to reject such attacks, as the writings of the Church patriarchs testifies. Nevertheless, the modern critics appear to have assumed that most of the manuscript differences between their favorite few and the great majority were deliberately created by scribes who desired to improve the original text. Hence, by their logic any of the manuscripts with better text must have resulted from later alterations.

I can come to no other conclusion, having read much of the committee's verse by verse reasoning which is presented in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. It is filled with unverified accusations of scribal falsification.

Kilpatrick (1978 pg 6) lists some of their "rules" as follows (he paraphrases the last two):

- the more difficult reading is to be preferred
- in general the shorter reading is to be preferred
- the reading which avoids harmonization or assimilation [textual agreement] is to be preferred
- the reading of inferior language or style is to be preferred

Such judgments by those critics expose them for what they are: scoffers who believe that the original text of the New Testament was poorly written, and that later copyists deceitfully altered the wording to improve it. Dear brothers, this way of thinking prevails throughout the academic world of Biblical Criticism.

### *Some Differences in the Text*

There are many important differences between the traditional Textus Receptus and the modern one preferred by the critics. Below are four specific examples. The first concerns two men listed in Matthew's genealogy of Christ. The old remnant manuscripts favored by the modern textual critics name the wrong men; even the critics admit this. Yet they still insist that is what Matthew originally wrote.

James Borland (1987 pg 41-52) gives a good description of this difference, which demonstrates how committed those modern critics are to the belief that the New Testament was a human book containing errors from the beginning, and was never divine. He said,

One example of current import is found in the readings of Matthew 1:7, 10. These texts contain part of the kingly genealogy of Christ. Many conservative commentators seem almost oblivious to the problem. But scholars who do not adhere to the doctrine of inerrancy do not pass up a chance to point out what they consider to be a fallacy in Matthew's autograph. The majority of all MSS read Asa and Amon, easily recognized as two kings of Judah who were ancestors of Christ. Matthew's point is to demonstrate our Lord's royal lineage.

But the United Bible Societies' text [and the Nestle/Aland] instead chooses alternative readings based on the 'better' [as they judge] manuscripts as well as some very subjective internal considerations. They substitute for the kings Asa and Amon the names 'Asaph' and 'Amos,' a psalmist and a prophet respectively. They reason that "the evangelist may have derived material for the genealogy, not from the Old Testament

directly, but from subsequent genealogical lists, in which the erroneous spelling occurred.”

Prior to that confident assertion, Bruce Metzger and others, claimed that “most scholars are impressed by the overwhelming weight of textual evidence supporting *Asaph*.” What is the composition of this “overwhelming weight of textual evidence” in favor of the *Asaph* blunder? [evidence given here] In summary, barely more than a dozen Greek MSS carry the *Asaph* reading, followed by a few Old Latin MSS, the Coptic and several minor versions. On the other hand, the expected *Asa* is found in literally hundreds of Greek witnesses ... [dating] from the fifth through the tenth centuries [Borland presents much detail here] [as well as] a number of Old Latin MSS ... The entire Vulgate ... as are the Curetonian, Sinaitic, Peshitta, Harclean, and Palestinian versions of the Syriac. To these may be added both Ephephanus and Augustine of the first quarter of the fifth Century.

Only a preconceived notion as to which witnesses are best would cause anyone to deny that the truly “overwhelming weight of textual evidence” favors the traditional reading of *Asa* ... The evidence for *Amon* versus *Amos* in Matthew 1:10 is somewhat similar ...

Lest one thinks this all amounts to academic irrelevance, we should be aware that the RSV places the prophet’s name *Amos* in the text of Matthew 1:10 with the note “other authorities read *Amon*.” The Catholic New American Bible (1970) reads *Amos* without explanation. The ASV, the RSV and the NASB each read *Asa* for Matthew 1:7 but append a note indicating that the Greek reads *Asaph*. But where does the reading for *Asa* come from if not also the Greek?

Another example of their preference for the old remnant manuscripts even if it results in a Biblical contradiction concerns the story of the girl who danced before Herod. In both Matthew and Mark, the traditional Textus Receptus calls her Herodias’s daughter. Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus plus a few others call her Herodias’s daughter in Matthew, but Herod’s daughter in Mark—a clear contradiction between the two biographies. Yet rather than doubt their favorite manuscripts, these modern critics accept the reading in Mark that contradicts the one in Matthew, saying (Metzger 1994 pg 77), “A majority of the Committee [of the UBS/NA text] decided ... [it] must be adopted on the strength of its external attestation”; meaning, because Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus plus a few others have it that way.

I found the following comments by Borland (1987 pgs 49-50) to be very insightful about the mentality of these modern skeptics:

In other words, the prevalent textual methodology can be and is being used to deny the inerrancy of the original autographs. Nearly a century ago George Salmon astutely observed that Westcott and Hort has attributed to the gospel writers “erroneous statements which their predecessors had regarded as copyists’ blunders.” Salmon noted that “there was indeed but little rhetorical exaggeration in the statement that the canon of these editors was that Codex B was infallible and the Evangelists were not. Nay, it seems as if Hort regarded it as a note of genuineness if a reading implies error on the part of the sacred writer.”

Another difference showing their extreme prejudice for the old remnants concerns Matthew 5:22. **“But I say to you, that every man who is angry at his brother without cause will be liable to the judgment...”** There is one Greek word (eikh) in this verse which means, “without cause.” The traditional Textus Receptus has it, but the modern one does not. Evidence against the word is one papyrus (p64), Sinaiticus (Aleph), Vaticanus (Beta), one minuscule (#1292), the Latin Vulgate version, an Ethiopic version, and several Church patriarchs. Evidence for the word includes hundreds of other manuscripts, plus all of the other ancient versions and Church patriarchs.

Bruce Metzger, speaking for the Committee of the UBS/NA text, gave their rationale for excluding the word eikh. (Dear brothers, judge for yourselves how scientifically objective is their thinking.) Metzger (1994 pg 11) said, “Although the reading with eikh is widespread from the second century onwards, it is much more likely that the word was added by copyists in order to soften the rigor of the precept, than omitted as unnecessary.”

What kind of logic would lead these modern skeptics to reject such overwhelming evidence that supports the word? In two sentences Gary Zeolla ([www.dtl.org](http://www.dtl.org)) summarizes their thinking very well, when he said,

This variant demonstrates a “formula” often used by the CT [critical text] people: Aleph + Beta + very little other manuscript evidence + their own subjective “rules” = the best reading. This pattern is followed even if the vast majority of manuscript evidence and the known historic facts are on the other side.

Perhaps the greatest single difference between the two texts is the ending of Mark’s biography of Jesus. This is another good illustration of their total commitment to the old deviant manuscripts. Their modern Textus Receptus ends the book at verse eight which says, **“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.”** The Alands (1989 pg 292) admit that most of the evidence is for the longer ending of the traditional Textus Receptus, but unwilling to doubt Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, they cannot accept it. Instead, they imagine that everything after the words “for they were afraid” is the result of a conspiracy by ancient Christians to conceal the awkward original ending:

It is true that the longer ending of Mark 16:9-20 is found in 99 percent of the Greek manuscripts as well as the rest of the tradition, enjoying over a period of centuries practically an official ecclesiastical sanction as a genuine part of the gospel of Mark. But in Codex Vaticanus (B) as well as in Codex Sinaiticus [Aleph] the gospel of Mark ends at Mark 16:8, as it did in numerous manuscripts according to the statements of Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome [who nevertheless included it in his Latin Vulgate translation] ... The widespread practice in the early Church of concluding the gospel of Mark at 16:8 was suppressed by Church tradition, but it could not be eradicated.

### *English Translations Based on the Modern Textus Receptus*

The first English translation based on the modern Textus Receptus of the textual critics was the English Revised Version published in 1881. The American counterpart of this version was the American Standard Version published in 1901. Other translations followed, and now the great majority of English translations rely primarily on that Greek text. Many of them contain footnotes telling of different manuscript variations. They sometimes refer

to these as “witnesses” or “authorities.” Some of their footnotes are very misleading, giving judgments like, “the best manuscripts” or “the most reliable manuscripts.” In almost every case what they call “best” or “most reliable” are the old remnants that are anything but “best” and “most reliable.”

Hence, beware of such footnotes in translations about the various manuscripts. The great majority of manuscripts differ so little and so insignificantly that such things are irrelevant in translations. To list such trivial differences in footnotes of translations would be to engage in the kind of thing that Paul condemned when he said, **“But avoid foolish questionings, and genealogies, and contentions, and legal fightings, for they are useless and vain”** (Titus 3:9). The New King James Version does include notes where the USB/NA text differs with the Majority Text that its translators used. Such information can be useful for advanced students to gain some acquaintance with how much the modern Textus Receptus differs with it.

### *New Greek Texts from the Majority of the Manuscripts*

Since there are some variations in the editions of the traditional Textus Receptus, and many more manuscripts have been discovered since they were published, efforts have continued in the quest for the exact original text from this great collection of common manuscripts. The most recent efforts have been *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, and, *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont. Both of those editions utilized the fruits of Hermann von Soden. He was a German pastor a century ago who, with the financial support of a wealthy female patron, tackled the formidable task of collating the mass of Greek manuscripts. According to the Alands (1989 pg 22),

... von Soden was able to enlist the efforts of about forty colleagues in all for the task of collating manuscripts in the libraries of Europe and other lands. Under such favorable circumstances the four-volume work appeared in 1902-1913 ... Part I is a vast quarry of information that is unavailable elsewhere. Von Soden’s studies in the Koine [common] text constitute pioneering research ... The text volume with its wealth of variant readings is also a useful source of information ... .

Hence, instead of relying upon a relatively tiny representative sample of the manuscripts as did each of the various earlier editions of the Textus Receptus, Hodges and Farstad, and Robinson and Pierpont were able to refer to a great many of the surviving manuscripts in their editorial work. And so, although closely related to the words of the earlier Textus Receptus editions, their editions are referred to as “Majority Text,” or, as Robinson and Pierpont prefer, “Majority Textform.” Nevertheless, they are part of the traditional Textus Receptus family, all being very similar because they are based upon the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts in contrast to the remnants containing a more diversified text.

### *Conclusion*

This essay is the result of months of research. I began somewhat biased in favor of the modern Textus Receptus. Yet, the more I read and studied, the more convinced I have

become about the genuineness of the majority of the New Testament manuscripts. Regarding the Old Testament, I have not done much research about those manuscripts. But what I found revealed to me that there is dispute about some Old Testament text as well.

As earlier stated, this essay is only a brief overview of the issues involved in the search for the original words of the New Testament. My goal was both to inform you of where best to look for them, and to strengthen your faith about them. Such a search was not necessary before the rise of the modern textual critics. But now Bibles are filled with supplemental words expressing doubts about much of the Word of God. Yet, it can all be summarized in these few words expressed by Borland (1987 pg 16-17):

Strange as it may appear, it is undeniably true, that the whole of the controversy may be reduced to the following narrow issue: Does the truth of the Text of Scripture dwell with the vast multitude of copies, uncial and cursive, concerning which nothing is more remarkable than the marvelous agreement which subsists between them? Or is it rather to be supposed that the truth abides exclusively with a very little handful of manuscripts, which at once differ from the great bulk of the witnesses, and—strange to say—also amongst themselves?

Dear brothers, there is no doubt in my mind that God has ultimate control over the affairs of the world, for our Lord said, **“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). And although God has allowed men to alter their practice of the good news of Christ from its original form, he also ensured that his New Testament would be accurately preserved, so that true Church of Christ could always exist. For such systems as the Catholic Church were not derived from Holy Scripture, nor are they supported by it.

Indeed, it was the testimony of the New Testament that revealed to faithful Christian men how much the dominant Catholic Church had deviated from the true Church, thus arousing the Protestant Reformation. And it was several centuries later that textual critics dredged up some long discarded manuscripts in an effort to discredit the great majority of them. Jesus said, **“From their fruits ye will know them”** (Matthew 7:16). And the fruit of modern Biblical Criticism has not strengthened faith in the Holy Scriptures, but instead has cast doubt upon them.

After studying much of what has been written by both sides of the text issue, I have chosen to trust the Greek New Testament edited by Robinson and Pierpont as best. I have a copy of that New Testament. And in it, following the title page, the editors make a statement of acknowledgements. That statement begins with the words, “For the Glory of God,” and it ends with the words, “All honor and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ!” I also have a copy of the 4th edition of the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies edited by Aland et al. I found no statement by those editors of even a recognition of God, much less words of praise for him and his Christ. This kind of evidence may be insignificant to unbelievers, but when it concerns judges of the Holy Scriptures, it is very significant to me.

A more scholarly defense of the Byzantine textform can be seen in the appendix to *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform, 2005*. That appendix contains an article defending the majority manuscripts, and was written by professor Maurice A. Robinson.

This life is a time of testing for our souls; the results of which will determine our eternal destiny. Therefore, God has so created this world that many things appear uncertain and ambiguous to us, including his own very existence. And so in this life we can only know of him by faith. Men who love truth and righteousness, and who seek for the true God, will—in faith—eventually be able to discover him.

In the same way, there is some uncertainty and ambiguity about his Holy Scriptures—not only the original inspired words themselves, but also their proper translation into other languages, and their correct interpretation. And in the same way, men who love truth and righteousness, and who seek for the genuine words of God, and their meaning, will—in faith—eventually be able to discover them. I hope I have helped you in your quest.

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

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