A Worthy Walk

Living Each Day
According to the Will of God

By

Dick Johnson

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

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Front Cover Photo

Linda hiking an abandoned mining road near Red Mountain Pass in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado (photo taken by the author in July 2020)

Back Cover Photo

The Red Mountains reflected in Crystal Lake
(photo taken by the author in July 2020)

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Author's Note

I was saved by the grace of God, through the witness of my mother, in 1965 when I was 8 years old. It was a special moment when I realized in my heart that Christ died for my sins. Over the next several years I gradually grew in the knowledge of God and His word, mostly through Sunday school at the churches my family attended. For the most part I had a desire to be a good Christian but often came up short and usually knew it. I remember having a fairly good idea of what I should and should not do but not necessarily based on a solid understanding of what the Bible said about it.

At the age of 18 (in 1974), as I was getting ready to enter college, a string of events that included an unintentionally careless and dangerous hiking experience that was soon followed by emergency kidney surgeries led to another life-changing moment. God used those events and a couple of men in particular[1] to open my eyes to things I had never seen in the Bible and gave me a desire to learn as much as possible and, later, to teach the word of God. During the next few years, because of what I was learning and especially as I began leading a youth group at church and teaching in a Bible study group outside of church, I began to realize that understanding the word of God was one thing, and applying what I was learning was quite another.

The questions that kept coming to mind involved trying to figure out God's will for my life and why so many of the Christians I knew, who had various degrees of Bible knowledge, did not necessarily translate their understanding into practical everyday life. I perceived that it was not uncommon for us, as believers (children of God), to live no differently than nonbelievers in many ways.

Thus began my desire to understand what it means to *walk worthy of our calling* (as Apostle Paul exhorted in Ephesians 4:1-3), to consciously try to conform my life to that understanding, and to share what I was learning with fellow brethren. Consequently, it has been both a direct and underlying theme of much of my Bible teaching over the years. I truly believe in my heart that the Bible provides *everything* we need to know how to live as God desires us to live. I can honestly say that my teaching has been directed at myself because of my own deficiencies, with the hope that at least some of it would resonate with and help those who hear my teaching or read my studies.

In this book, therefore, I am attempting to explain what it means to walk worthy of our calling. This endeavor draws substantially from studies I have prepared over the last five decades, along with new material to fill in gaps. Some of those studies are provided in the website *Gospel of Grace Notes* that was launched in 2020 (see Appendix A for a current list).

You will see that I write out numerous Bible verses and passages. They are what I consider to be representative verses to explain or support a statement, and I diligently try to use them in their proper context. I employ several different Bible versions as I prepare my studies, but my favorites are the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) and the *King James Version* Bible (KJV) because I consider them to be the most accurate (though not perfect) English translations available at this time. The churches I attended in my youth used the KJV. Although I still use and depend on the KJV extensively, the NASB is my primary study and teaching Bible.

In this book I quote from my 1996 edition of the NASB (*NASB Side-Column Reference Edition*) in bold font and in paragraph form because it is written in modern English while retaining a very high standard of accuracy.

[1] I was blessed by God through the ministries of Cornelius Stam, founder and former president of the non-denominational Berean Bible Society, and Win Johnson, former pastor of the independent Berean Church that he established in Thornton, Colorado (both deceased).

Nonbolded words enclosed in brackets were inserted by me; nonitalicized words are equivalent words from the KJV, while italicized words were added by me for clarification (I believe they are correct, but I cannot always guarantee it). My inserted words are derived from my understanding of the context of the verse or from other Bible versions such as *The Amplified Bible*, the *New International Version*, and the *English Standard Version*. I encourage you to look up the verses and passages in the Bible version you use.

Extremely valuable tools for my studies are my concordances. The following concordances used in my research for this book (my latest editions—some earlier ones were given away or needed to be replaced) are all keyed to the same numbering (index) system for the Hebrew and Greek words that are in the ancient texts from which the KJV and NASB were translated, which makes my searches as thorough and efficient as possible. I am indebted to the people God used to develop these valuable references.

Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (James Strong, Abingdon Press, 1983)

New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries (Robert L. Thomas, General Editor, Copyright © 1981 by The Lockman Foundation, Holman Bible Publishers)

The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament (George V. Wigram, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997)

The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament (George V. Wigram, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002)

I use the first two concordances not only to find verses with specific English words, but to determine the Hebrew and Greek words from which the English words in my NASB and KJV were translated. Then I go to the Hebrew or Greek concordances, as applicable, to find all the verses in which those specific Hebrew and Greek words appear. I am not a student of ancient Hebrew and Greek, but this process helps me understand the meaning of the words in the context in which they were used. Spellings of the Hebrew and Greek words differ slightly between the concordances, and to simplify this study I use the words as they appear in the latter two concordances.

Although I have learned a great deal from people in my life and other authors, you will see that I do not quote or reference the works or opinions of others; the information presented in this book is what I sincerely believe based on my understanding of Scripture. I prefer, rather, to provide Scripture references for most, if not all, of my doctrinal statements and conclusions so that you can determine for yourself the meaning of the verses or passages. I realize that inserting references within parentheses can break up the flow of a sentence, but I want you to know the source of what I said.

You will also see that I refer to our Lord as *Jesus* or as *Jesus Christ*, *Christ*, or *the Lord Jesus Christ*. Using Apostle Paul's letters as an example, I refer to our Lord as *Jesus* when the context involves His position of humility when He served His people in the form of a man. I use His other names when the context refers to His exalted position at the right hand of God after He completed His work for us at the cross. I explain this more fully in my study **Who Do We Worship?** provided in Appendix B.

It is highly likely that you will not agree with some of my perspectives and conclusions. That is OK, as I know that all true understanding of the word of God is by the working of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-12; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:44-45). Furthermore, I humbly realize and admit that I am subject to doctrinal error, and I have had to revise some points of my teaching over the years as new, and hopefully better, understanding has come to mind. My hope is that you base your conclusions on what the Bible says

and not defer to traditional Christian or church teaching that may, or may not, be correct depending on the subject.

I encourage you to start reading from the beginning of the book and not jump ahead to chapters or headings of specific interest to you. I have tried to establish a foundation in the first chapters that is intended to help explain and support what follows. By adhering to the chronological order of the contents, I think you will be less likely to misunderstand or take out of context a point that I am making later. Additionally, you might gain a new perspective or scriptural confirmation about a familiar subject.

Please consider this book as a long personal letter sharing my thoughts with you, regardless of your spiritual or denominational background. My intent is not to preach to you, which might imply that I fully understand everything that I am presenting. In truth, I am continually amazed and humbled by the power and depth of the word of God and it seems that I learn something new every time I open my Bible, prepare for or teach a lesson, or hear someone read a familiar verse or passage during Bible study meetings. My prayer is that this study will strengthen or enhance your joy and understanding of the word of God, and that God will use it for His honor and glory.

Before moving on, I want to say how thankful I am to God for blessing me with Linda, my beloved wife since 1981 and my best friend. She has stood with me and fully supported me in my passion for, and ministry of, the gospel of the grace of God. Through countless discussions (beginning during our courtship), reviews of my studies, and input during Bible study meetings, she has been used by God to help me better understand His word, to help me try to teach it in an understandable manner, and to trigger the need (through further study) to revise my doctrinal understanding and teaching when necessary. God further used her abilities to build our website, which is something we had discussed doing over a period of several years. Thank you, Linda!

Dick Johnson

Chapter 1

Introduction to a Worthy Walk

Therefore I [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [vocation] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)

For this reason also, since the day we [*Paul and Timothy*] **heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His** [*God's*] **will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints** [*believers*] **in Light.**[1] (Colossians 1:9-12)

The above Bible passages speak of walking worthy, as do I Thessalonians 2:12 and Philippians 1:27. Many of us are familiar with the saying about *walking the walk* as opposed to merely *talking the talk*. This book is about walking the walk or, as stated another way, walking the talk. Some of the words and phrases in these passages bring to mind the following questions:

- What is meant by *walk*?
- What is our *calling* or *vocation*?
- What does it mean to *walk worthy of our calling*?
- How are we supposed to know how to *walk worthy of our calling*?
- Can a person actually *walk in a worthy manner*?

I hope to satisfactorily answer these questions in this book. To begin with, I will define *walk* as I understand it. Addressing the saying about walking the walk, in terms of the above passages, it is about applying what we know to our everyday lives. It is one thing to know what we should do, but do we actually do it? Or do we disregard what we know and just do what we feel is right for us in the moment? Do we even know what to do, or not to do, in the first place? Besides the passages presented above, there are other verses that contain the word *walk* that are in the context of this study and we will look at them throughout this book.

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your [the] **faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.** (Colossians 2:6-7)

To very briefly preview the purpose of this book, it is about living each day according to the will of God. But how is one supposed to know or find the will of God? What do we get out of walking worthy—what is our motivation? What is holding us back from walking worthy? I am going to explore the answers to these

[1] In my 1996 edition of the NASB, the editors changed *light* to *Light* in this and other verses, suggesting that the phrase means believers in Christ who is the light of life (II Corinthians 4:3-4; John 8:12). However, I think *light* is more appropriate because, as believers, we are no longer in darkness but in light (Ephesians 5:8; I Thessalonians 5:4-6); that is, we are no longer dead in sin but alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7). For consistency, however, I will quote verses and passages as they are presented in the 1996 edition.

questions, and the other questions listed above, for your consideration. But first, a foundation needs to be set.

Quite a few people, like me, have needed some sort of surgery at one time or another. I took for granted that the doctors who operated on me, as well as all their assistants in the operating room, knew what they were doing. All of them had undergone years of education followed by years of training and experience, capped by required certifications, to be qualified to do their jobs. I am thankful for their due diligence because my life was in their hands. We, too, need to know what we are doing in our daily walk for God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unlike doctors and most professions and trades, however, Christians do not need specialized education, training, or certifications (e.g., through religious institutions) to live as we ought to live. For example, consider the twelve disciples chosen by our Lord—none of them had formal religious training to make them qualified to follow and serve Him. However, we do need to learn what we should do and why we should do it, which requires a sincere effort on our part, and then endeavor to do it. We will not learn everything at once or do everything we should do right away. Our walk for God is a lifetime process and will include many uphill climbs as well as some descents. Through it all, though, we can be assured that God is working in us and will accomplish His will.

> **For I** [*Paul*] **am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work** [*salvation*] **in you will perfect** [perform] **it until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 1:6)

> **So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work** [do] **for His good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

> **For we** [*believers*] **are His** [*God's*] **workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:10)

You will find that a lot of Bible verses and passages are typed out for your convenience, and many more are referenced. That is because the Bible is my source of information. Why is that? As shown in the following passage, I believe with all my heart that the Bible is the word of God and that it provides everything we need—all the information and tools—to know what God wants us to know about Him and about how He wants us to live each day.

> **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching** [doctrine]**, for reproof, for correction, for training** [instruction] **in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate** [*complete*]**, equipped for every good work.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

The Bible, completed nearly 2,000 years ago, is the complete word of God to us—nothing is to be added to it. This is confirmed by Apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation regarding the final prophecies involving Israel and its promised kingdom of heaven on earth (Revelation 22:18-19). It is also confirmed by Apostle Paul who revealed to us *the mystery* that had been kept secret by God since before the foundation of the earth (Colossians 1:24-27; Ephesians 3:8-12). Though not well understood, the subject of the kingdom is familiar to most Christians. The mystery, on the other hand, is rather unknown even though Paul referred to it often in his letters to fellow believers (the books of Romans through Philemon). I discuss the subjects of prophecy, which mostly pertains to the kingdom, and the mystery in some detail later because I believe that an understanding of these subjects is critical to understanding how God expects us to live for Him today.

There is one word of God (the Bible), but there is an abundance of Christian denominations and independent churches that all differ from each other on one or more doctrinal points and traditions. Why is this? There are many reasons, but perhaps the biggest one is due to the misunderstanding and misuse of the Bible. We are exhorted to rightly divide, or accurately handle, the word of God (about which I will discuss the meaning in Chapter 4), and yet human nature drives us to pick and choose what we want to believe or not believe. Consequently, we tend to make the Bible mean whatever we want it to mean to serve our purposes, often creating our own *truth* and traditions.

> **Be diligent** [*endeavor*] **to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

> **I** [*Paul*] **solemnly charge you** [*Timothy*] **in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they** [*fellow believers*] **will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.** (II Timothy 4:1-4)

It is my desire in my teaching and through this book to accurately use and present the word of God as exhorted in II Timothy 2:15, and to avoid the pitfalls of distorting the truth or creating new *truth* just to satisfy others as warned in II Timothy 4:1-4. I hope you find this to be the case.

There is more to understand in establishing the foundation for walking worthy of our calling. What are the prerequisites? Can anybody please God? Can I randomly open my Bible, point to a verse, and apply it to my life? Please bear with me as I address these things in some depth in the next three chapters. I believe that it is vitally important to know and understand who we are (how we stand) before God and what He has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ before we can hope to please Him. Furthermore, it is necessary that we use the word of God wisely as exhorted in the above passages. I will then use that foundation to build the case on how and why we should walk worthy of our calling.

I want to close this introduction by dispelling a false interpretation of a worthy walk. I hope that you will see in this study that in the context of Scripture, to walk worthy is *not* about earning our salvation, proving to God, ourselves, or anyone else that we deserved our salvation, or earning the favor or blessings of God because no one is worthy of the salvation or blessings that we receive by His grace. Let us explore, with open hearts and open Bibles, what a worthy walk means.

Chapter 2

Our Standing Before God

Now I [*Paul*] **make known to you, brethren, the gospel** [*good news*] **which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

Is Everyone a Child of God?

Before we can learn how to walk in a worthy manner, we need to understand how we stand. Think about an auto mechanic, for example. Our vehicles are technologically advanced machines, and I prefer to have a mechanic or technician who is properly trained and certified in the evaluation, maintenance, and repair of my make and model to work on my car. In our case, we cannot know how to live for God until we understand how we stand before Him and learn what He expects of us. Therefore, we need to start at the beginning. How do we stand before God?

A common perception is that everyone is a child of God because, after all, God made us. This is a natural and comforting thought, but is that how God sees us? Let us look to see what Scripture says.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you [*brethren—fellow believers*] **have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our** [*human*] **spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8:14-17)

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons [children] **of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.** (Ephesians 2:1-3)

In the above passages, there are references to the *children of God* and the *children of wrath*. In Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, he was writing to all who were beloved of God in the city of Rome (Romans 1:7), which was the political center of the far-reaching and still-expanding Roman Empire. Paul was writing to people who would have been referred to as *Christians* by Roman citizens; these were the people who were children of God (Galatians 3:26-29).

The other passage is from Paul's letter to those who would have been referred to as Christians in the city of Ephesus, as well as being an open letter to all similar people (Ephesians 1:1-2). In that passage, Paul reminded the people of their spiritual condition *prior* to being a Christian. He referred to them, and himself, as being children of wrath by nature.

These two passages show that God is making a distinction between two types of people: His children and children of wrath. We are either His children through adoption; that is, we are not His natural children but have been accepted by God as His own children with the full rights of natural born children (Ephesians 1:5-6)—

it is the same as we consider adoption today. Or we are by nature children of wrath (destined for judgment by God) who walk according to the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air. That prince is referring to Satan, who is the god of this world (John 12:31; Acts 26:18; Ephesians 6:12; I John 5:19; Revelation 12:7-9) and who was the first created being to rebel against or disobey God (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15).

> **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons** [children] **of disobedience** [*all nonbelievers*[1]]**. Therefore do not be partakers with them;**[2] **for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.** (Ephesians 5:6-8)

> **And even if our gospel is veiled** [*hidden*]**, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world** [*Satan*] **has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.** (II Corinthians 4:3-4)

In God's eyes, therefore, each individual is either His child or a child of disobedience. Because all people prior to salvation walk by nature (we are naturally dead in sin) according to Satan, I believe that *children of disobedience* (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Colossians 3:6) means the same as Satan's children; we are either God's child or Satan's child. It is not human nature to consider our condition in this way. It is commonly taught, and probably most of us believe it is so, that there is good in all of us. We naturally hope that God will take into consideration our goodness and that it will hopefully outweigh the bad aspects of our lives. Our Almighty and righteous God does not work that way, however.

What is a Christian?

Before proceeding with this thought, I want to address the term *Christian* as I have used it. Many denominations and individuals consider themselves to be Christian. When asking a person why he considers himself to be a Christian, his response might include one or more of the following: "I believe in God," "I believe in Jesus," "I go to a Christian church" or "I am a member of a Christian church (or specific denomination)," "I was baptized," "The pastor prayed for me," "I accepted Jesus into my heart," "I try to follow the teachings of Jesus," "I follow the *Golden Rule*," "I do more good than bad," or maybe even "Because I am an American." Perhaps he might answer, "Because I believe the gospel of salvation." What, exactly, is a Christian?

A definition of a Christian is one who professes belief in Jesus as Christ or who follows the religion based on His teachings (from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*). This definition covers a broad spectrum of people. Professing Jesus as Christ can mean many things, such as simply acknowledging that Jesus is (or was) the Son of God and/or the Messiah. Following the religion based on His teachings encompasses every denomination that claims some connection with Jesus. In truth, Christianity is a religion—an ideology or system of beliefs in similar fashion to other religions. It is something to which a person can convert from another religion or from no religion. However, truly identifying with Christ is a relationship instead of a religion, and it occurs by faith through an operation of God by His Holy Spirit instead of adopting or conforming to a system of beliefs.

How does the Bible use the term *Christian*? The Greek word for *Christian* is *Kristianos*, and it appears only three times in the texts used to translate the Bible into English. In the KJV and the NASB, the Greek word is translated as *Christian* in Acts 26:28 and I Peter 4:16, and as *Christians* in Acts 11:26. The words *Christian* and

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[1] The Greek word for *disobedience* is *apīthīa*, which is translated as *unbelief* in the KJV (Romans 11:30-32; Hebrews 4:6, 11).

[2] That is, do not do as they do—do not join with them in sinful activities or be their accomplices in sin (Colossians 3:5-11; Ephesians 5:3-7; see also Ephesians 4:17-24).

Christians may appear multiple times in other Bible versions, but where they are used in other than these three verses, they are interpretations based on other Greek words such as those more correctly rendered as *brethren* or similar words.

In the three verses with the word *Kristianos*, *Christian* is used as a description of followers of Christ from a nonbeliever's perspective. In Acts 11:26, the disciples of Christ in Antioch were the first to be called Christians. They were called as Christians by whom? The verse does not say that the disciples called themselves Christians; instead, the nonbelieving population of Antioch called them Christians because the disciples were observed to be followers of Christ. In Apostle Paul's defense to King Agrippa of Judea regarding false accusations brought against him, Agrippa conceded that in a short time Paul might persuade him to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). It was Agrippa who considered Paul to be a Christian, not Paul himself. Finally, in I Peter 4:16, Apostle Peter explained to the believers that it is good to suffer as a Christian, referring to persecution by the nonbelieving authorities and population against those who were observed or known to be followers of Christ. Would our nonbelieving relatives, friends, or coworkers consider us to be Christians?

If believers did not refer to each other as *Christians* in the Bible, what should we call ourselves? In the Bible we have thirteen letters (Romans through Philemon) that we know were written by Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). His letters, also called epistles, were written to those who believed the gospel (good news) of salvation and were taught the gospel of the grace of God. How did he refer to them? By far, he most commonly called them *brethren* (e.g., Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:1), but he also referred to them as *believers* or those who believe (I Thessalonians 2:10; I Timothy 4:12), *brothers* (Romans 14:13), *sisters* (Romans 16:1), and *my beloved* (Philippians 2:12).

Furthermore, Paul opened many of his letters by addressing the recipients as *saints* (e.g., Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:2), referring to *all* his fellow brethren (not just a select few as done by some denominations today). Believers are also referred to as *children of God* (Romans 8:16), *sons of God* (Romans 8:14-15), *heirs of God* (Romans 8:17), and the *beloved of God* (Romans 1:7). We are also members of *the body of Christ*, which is also called *the church* (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23), and *ambassadors for Christ* (II Corinthians 5:20). We have a lot of ways, therefore, to refer to each other. In his letters, however, Paul did not refer to fellow believers as *disciples* or followers of Christ. That is because we are actually in Christ (Romans 8:1) and Christ is in us (Romans 8:10; Colossians 1:27)—each of us is a member of His body.

With this in mind, is it wrong to refer to ourselves or our fellow brethren as Christians? I believe not, as long as we are careful not to associate ourselves with the religious (worldly) concept of Christianity. In the remainder of this book, however, I try to refrain from referring to believers as Christians unless the context is from a nonbeliever's perspective. Instead, I will refer to them as believers, brethren, members of the body of Christ, or children of God.

But how does one become a Christian in the scriptural sense as described above; that is, a true child of God? How would King Agrippa have become a Christian, which there is no indication, however, that he did so. How does one become a child of God?

Salvation—Who Needs It?

Our Natural Condition

How, exactly, do we stand before God in our natural condition? An unalterable fact is that *everyone* sins—everyone thinks or does things that are contrary to the righteousness of God. Consequently, God sees or recognizes *all* of us as dead in sin and separated from His righteousness and glory. Even one sin separates us

from God, but no one is guilty of just one sin. As hard as it may be for us to comprehend, in our natural condition we are children of Satan and deserving the wrath of God; we are without spiritual hope (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12; I Thessalonians 4:13). The consequence of being a child of Satan is eternal judgment by, and separation from, God. That is, if we physically die while still being dead in our sins, then we will stand guilty before God's throne of judgment and be eternally separated from Him (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15). This is a sobering truth that should not be disregarded by anyone. I examine the judgments of God in greater detail in Chapter 11.

> **As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."** (Romans 3:10-12)

> **But now apart from the Law** [*of Moses*] **the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** (Romans 3:21-23)

God's Remedy

If everyone in our natural condition sins and is separate from God, what hope do we have? God provided a way—*one way*—to be changed from a child of Satan to a child of God. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Christ took our sins upon Himself and paid the price required by God by dying for us on the cross. His death in itself was insufficient, however. God then raised Christ up from the dead. It is that power of resurrection that ensures the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life in Christ. Because He was raised from physical and spiritual death to life, we have life (now and for eternity) in Christ (Romans 5:6-11; 6:3-11).

> **He** [*God the Father*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (II Corinthians 5:21)

> **In Him** [*Christ*] **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses** [sins]**, according to the riches of His grace.** (Ephesians 1:7)

> **I** [*Paul*] **pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His** [*God's*] **calling** [*salvation*]**, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints** [*believers*]**, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His** [*God's*] **might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** (Ephesians 1:18-21)

> **But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.** (Titus 3:4-7)

How Does a Person Become a Child of God?

How do we get this forgiveness and eternal life? It is simply this: we are to sincerely believe in our heart the gospel of salvation that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. This humble demonstration

of faith—belief from the heart—acknowledges that we admit that we are sinners in need of salvation and that Christ paid the penalty for us (Colossians 2:13). God saves us by His grace; He only requires belief in the gospel of salvation because no works of righteousness on our part can gain His forgiveness.

> **Now I** [*Paul*] **make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

> **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

> **But what does it** [*Scripture*] **say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord,**[3] **and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.** (Romans 10:8-10)

Please think about the passages that have already been provided. Everything that follows in this book is meaningless and unattainable without the foundation of salvation. How do you stand before God? Do you believe that Christ died for your sins and that He was buried and was raised from the dead? If you do, then you belong to God—you are His child. Nothing else is required by God. He does not require good works, water baptism, membership in a particular church or denomination, or anything else to become His child and be saved from the consequences of our sins.

Because it is from the heart, we can believe this good news of salvation anytime or anywhere. Believing the gospel of salvation is like saying "Thank you" to God for what He did for us through His Son Jesus Christ at the cross. There are no set words or prayer required by God or anyone else, but we can say, whether silently from within or out load, something like, "Thank you, God, for sending your Son Jesus Christ to die for my sins and for raising Him up from the dead so that I will have life." No one needs to be present to officiate or validate our demonstration of faith before God or to anoint or pray for us because salvation is the work of God (Colossians 2:8-13; II Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-7). Do you believe that Christ died for you? My hope and prayer are that you do.

Blessings of Salvation

In Ephesians 1:3, believers are told that we are blessed with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Please carefully read the following passages as an introduction to the blessings we receive by the grace of God because of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for us.

> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He** [*God*] **chose us in Him** [*Christ*] **before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He** [*God*] **predestined us to adoption as sons** [children] **through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind**

[3] This is a confession of faith to God (not people), figuratively *speaking* from the heart but literally talking to God, admitting that we are sinners in need of salvation and that Christ died for our sins and was raised up from the dead.

intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved [*Christ*]**.** (Ephesians 1:3-6)

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's [*Adam's*] **disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One** [*Christ*] **the many will be made righteous.** (Romans 5:18-19)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [sins]**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.** (Ephesians 2:4-6)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks [Gentiles]**, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.** (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

The blessings in the above passages and some of the other blessings that each and every person automatically receives the moment we believe the gospel of salvation are provided below. These are the gifts of God through the work of Christ at the cross (i.e., we did not earn or deserve any of them), and I like to think of these blessings as our benefits package.

- We have forgiveness of our sins (Romans 3:23-25; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32).
- We have inherited eternal life (Romans 5:21; 6:22-23; Titus 3:4-7).
- We are at peace with God—He has reconciled us to Himself (Romans 5:1, 10-11).
- We are chosen in Christ (Ephesians 1:4; II Thessalonians 2:13-14).
- We are in Christ and He is in us (Romans 8:1, 9-11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:27).
- We were called by God to salvation according to His purpose (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 2:13).
- We have been adopted as children of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:5).
- We are members of the true church, which is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23; Galatians 3:26-28).
- We are members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19-22).
- We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit—we have eternal security and cannot lose our salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:38-39).
- We have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; 8:11).
- We are alive in Christ instead of dead in sin (Romans 6:8-11; Ephesians 2:5).
- We have been regenerated (made into a new creation)—we are born again, washed, made new (Titus 3:5; I Corinthians 6:11; II Corinthians 5:17).
- We are spiritually seated with Christ in His current position in heaven—we are citizens of heaven (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20).
- We are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10).
- We have been justified—we are declared *not guilty*, just as if we had never sinned (Romans 3:26; 4:25; 5:1, 9; 8:30; Titus 3:7).

- We have been sanctified—we are set apart by God as sacred to Himself (Romans 6:22; I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).
- We have been glorified—we have been exalted or elevated to a position of honor by God because we are in Christ (Romans 8:30).
- We are considered (reckoned) by God to be holy and blameless in Christ despite our continuing sinfulness (Ephesians 1:4); we are considered righteous by God because we are in Christ (Romans 4:5, 22-25; 5:17; II Corinthians 5:21).
- We have inherited the riches of God's grace and glory (Ephesians 1:7, 18).
- We are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10); He is working through us according to His will (Philippians 2:12-13).
- Nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:31-39).

Brethren, this list of blessings is beyond comprehension and most certainly is not complete. Praise God for everything He has done for us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! May we often remember and reflect on these things, with humility and thanksgiving.

How Do We Know We are Saved?

Unfortunately, there are many people who consider themselves to be Christians, for one or more of the reasons previously listed, but who are not actually saved. That is, whatever they believed or did to become a Christian was in vain (I Corinthians 15:2); they relied on false doctrine or good works to appease God. As shown above, however, we must *believe* from our heart the gospel of salvation. At the moment we do that, we are accepted in Christ and received by Him[4] (Romans 15:7; Ephesians 1:6—KJV).

So, how can we be certain we are saved? First and foremost, by faith we must take God's word for it. God is true to His word, so if He says that we are saved if we believe the gospel of salvation, then we are saved. Also, believing that Christ died for us changes us from being an enemy of God (because of our natural sinful condition) to a child of God. Therefore, we are now at peace with God (Romans 5:1-11). We are told that in our natural sinful condition we cannot understand the things of God or please Him (I Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:6-8). As believers in Christ, however, we can begin to understand the things of God because we now have the Holy Spirit in us (I Corinthians 2:12-13; Ephesians 1:15-19). Furthermore, by the working of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our own human spirit that we are the children of God.

> **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8:14-17)

Knowing these things, and putting our trust in God's faithfulness, should bring the inner assurance and peace that we are truly in Christ and children of God (Philippians 4:6-9; Romans 8:26-28). Do you know with certainty that you are saved?

[4] Contrary to common teaching, the Bible does not say that we need to accept Jesus or Christ as our Savior or receive Him into our heart. It is God through Christ who accepts and receives us when we believe the gospel of salvation.

Can We Lose Our Salvation?

As we have seen, salvation is a gift of God bestowed on us when we believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. What if, after believing the gospel of salvation, we mess up our lives? Will God take the gift of salvation back? Can we lose our salvation?

Despite our best intentions and efforts, all believers will continue to sin after being saved. Upon believing the gospel of salvation, we receive a new spirit—the Holy Spirit of God (Romans 8:9-11; I Corinthians 2:12-13). However, by God's design we do not lose our natural sinful spirit, which is our old self. Consequently, we have two natures within ourselves that battle each other (Romans 7:14-25). Can we become so sinful, or do something so bad that God rejects us? No, because all our sins have been forgiven through Christ's work at the cross, and God has reconciled us to Himself (Romans 3:23-26; 5:8-11). Each believer is God's chosen possession, and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:31-39). Because we are in Christ, there is no condemnation for subsequent sins that we commit (Romans 8:1). We are sealed as God's own possession by His Holy Spirit, which is a seal that cannot be broken. Brethren, rest assured that we cannot lose our salvation.

> **In Him** [*Christ*]**, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

> **For I** [*Paul*] **am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8:38-39)

Although our sins are forgiven (past, present, and future—Hebrews 10:11-13; Romans 3:21-26), we should not prove how gracious God is by willfully continuing to live sinful lives (Romans 6:1-2). Instead, we are to live as if we are children of God. In the following chapters we will take a close look at what that entails. From this point on, I will be referring to *you*, *we*, and *us* as believers or brethren—that is, those who believe the gospel of salvation.

More About Salvation

In Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he was writing to the believers in Corinth with whom he had spent about one and a half years teaching the things of God (Acts 18:1-11). He reminded them of the first and most important truth that he had told them: they were saved by believing the good news that Christ had died for their sins, was buried, and rose again. I cannot stress enough that this is all that God requires for us to become His children. It is so simple that our minds have difficulty accepting it. By nature, we want to earn what we get—we want to take credit for it. But the simple gospel of salvation is all we need to know and believe to be saved.

There is much more in Scripture about the subject of salvation. *After* we are saved, we can begin to learn what God has to say about it. I have broached this subject of first importance by listing some of our blessings of salvation as well as explaining our assurance of salvation. By learning what God did for us at the cross through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can gain a greater understanding about how and why He expects us to live as His children—how to walk worthy of our salvation. Therefore, I will discuss salvation some more from different perspectives in subsequent chapters, and hope that it will be edifying.

Chapter 3

Walk Worthy of Our Calling

Therefore I [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [vocation] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Our Calling

In the above passage, which was addressed to believers, we are exhorted by God through Apostle Paul (who was in a Roman prison for the cause of Christ by the will of God) to walk worthy of our calling. What does the word *calling* (*vocation* in the KJV) in Ephesians 4:1 refer to? One normally thinks of our calling or vocation as a job. We hear people say they are *called to be a pastor*, *called to be an evangelist*, or *called to be a missionary*; whether they are actually doing God's will is sometimes questionable. However, most believers have other jobs and rarely refer to themselves as *called to be a kindergarten teacher*, *a plumber, an auto worker, an engineer, etc*. Is this verse referring to our job or Christian service, or to something else?

Ephesians 4:1 begins with the word *therefore*. This indicates that the meaning or purpose of the statement is based on what Paul had already talked about in the letter. The resounding theme of the first three chapters of Ephesians is on what God has done for us through Christ. It has to do with our position in Christ—what we have through our salvation—instead of our job or work as believers. When you have a few minutes to spare, I recommend that you read the first three chapters of Ephesians to see for yourself.

The Greek word for *vocation* in Ephesians 4:1 is *kleesis*. It is translated as *vocation* only once in the KJV; all other times it is translated as *calling* (the other verses are Romans 11:29; I Corinthians 1:26; 7:20; Ephesians 1:18; 4:4; Philippians 3:14; II Thessalonians 1:11; II Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1; and II Peter 1:10). In these verses the word *calling* refers to what God has done for us, or our position as believers in Christ, instead of what we are doing for God. For example:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling. (Ephesians 4:4)

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. (II Timothy 1:8-9)

As believers, we were *called* by God; He called us to Himself for His purpose. Also, when God calls, He will bring it to pass because of His faithfulness and sovereign will (I Thessalonians 5:24; Romans 8:26-28; 11:33-36; Isaiah 14:27; 55:11). Please think about it, brethren. Are we saved because we *decided* or *chose* to accept Jesus as our Savior (thus implying that we can reject God's call), or are we individually saved and accepted by God (Ephesians 1:6—KJV) because He called us to salvation and enabled us, through the working of His Holy Spirit, to believe the gospel of salvation? I believe that the following verses, among many others, answer this question.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first-born among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also

called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (I Corinthians 1:9)

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Thessalonians 2:13-14)

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (I Timothy 6:12)

How does God call people to salvation? Some of us are familiar with a pastor's *invitation* or *call* to salvation, which could be perceived by some as giving credit to the pastor (e.g., "I am saved because I answered the pastor's call."). In the above passages, however, God is doing the calling. He does it through His word and enables us to believe His gospel of salvation (by faith) through the work of the Holy Spirit—it is entirely His work.

Yes, God may use a pastor to teach or explain the gospel of salvation, but salvation is based on what God did for us through Christ at the cross. We must believe the gospel of salvation whether we hear it from a pastor, Bible teacher, loved one, friend, or stranger. Or we may read it on our own in the Bible or in some book or pamphlet about the Bible. We can also hear it on the radio, TV, or our phone. Whatever the means used by God, we must believe what God says—that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead. If we do believe the gospel of salvation, then hopefully we can look back at some point, as we are enlightened by God, and thank Him for calling (choosing) us for salvation and enabling us to believe the gospel.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ [God]**.**[1] (Romans 10:17)

In Him [*Christ*]**, you also, after listening to** [*hearing*] **the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own** [purchased] **possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

Therefore, walking worthy of our vocation (calling) is not based on any job, profession, or position in life that we strive to fulfill, but on who we are in Christ. We are to walk worthy of our calling as believers, which is our salvation in Christ. This is one of the reasons why salvation is presented in the previous chapter—it is the foundation or basis for a worthy walk.

Walking Worthy of Our Calling

If our calling refers to our salvation in Christ (which I am certain that it does), and our walk refers to our daily obedience to God, what does it mean to walk *worthy* of our calling? For some, it could mean paying God

[1] The context of this verse seems to indicate that the KJV rendering of "the word of God" *may* be more appropriate than "the word of Christ" in the NASB (see Romans 10:1-3, 18-21). However, we are saved by believing (faith) in what God accomplished for us through Christ's work at the cross, which could be explained as the word of (or *the word concerning*) Christ (Romans 1:8-9; Philippians 1:27). Furthermore, because the word concerning Christ is also the word of God, it probably is not beneficial to definitively discern which rendering is more correct than the other.

back for our salvation or earning our salvation (i.e., we are making ourselves worthy of salvation). However, no one is worthy of salvation because everyone is considered by God to be dead in our sins and no one seeks God (Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 3:10-18). We are saved entirely by the grace of God by faith apart from works of righteousness. Furthermore, God never demands or asks us to pay Him back for our salvation. If so, then our salvation would be earned instead of being a gift of God. Nor can we do anything to guarantee our salvation; God has already done this by sealing our salvation by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). If we think there is anything we can do to earn or prove our salvation, then we are essentially saying or admitting that Christ's work at the cross was not enough to meet God's payment for sin.

> **Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due** [*earned*]**. But to the one who does not work** [*for righteousness*]**, but believes in Him** [*God*] **who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.** (Romans 4:4-5)

> **For by grace you** [*brethren*] **have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So, what does it mean to walk worthy of our salvation? The word *worthy* in Ephesians 4:1 is translated from the Greek word *axiōs*. This word appears only six times in Scripture; the other five times are in Romans 16:2, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 1:10, I Thessalonians 2:12, and III John 1:6. When read in their context, the word *worthy* in these verses is used to mean *as becoming* or *as fitting*. Therefore, we are to walk in manner that is befitting our salvation in Christ as a child of God—we should live appropriately. As children of God, we are ambassadors for (representatives of) Christ (II Corinthians 5:20), and it should be our desire to live as good ambassadors. Stated another way, we should not disregard or throw away our gift of salvation; instead, we should treasure the gift we have been given (Romans 3:21-26; 5:15-17; 6:23) and endeavor to live in such a way that brings honor and glory to God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, please recall the blessings of salvation we have that were listed in the previous chapter. Because God has revealed to us what He has done for us through Christ, it stands to reason that He would tell us what we should do to please Him. The Bible is the word of God—His word to us—and it is full of instructions. However, the many religions and denominations bear witness to the fact that people generally use the Bible to fit their own purposes resulting in countless interpretations on how to please God. Or some simply disregard what the Bible says and develop their own ways to please God (essentially the god of their imagination). So, after salvation, what does God want us to do in response to what He has done for us? How do we walk worthy of our calling—our salvation—in Christ?

The passages of Ephesians 4:1-3 and Colossians 1:9-12 provide a brief overview of what God expects regarding a worthy or appropriate daily walk as His children. In them we are exhorted to:

- Be humble and gentle toward one another.
- Be patient with one another.
- Show tolerance for one another in love.
- Preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with our fellow brethren.
- Please God in all respects.
- Bear fruit in every good work.
- Increase in the knowledge of God.
- Joyously give thanks to God our Father.

We will take a closer look at these and other aspects of our walk in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, we will address roadblocks to walking worthy; that is, thoughts and actions, as well as what we believe, that

hinder an appropriate walk. But first, I want to present what God says about *how* to use His word. As noted earlier there are many instructions throughout the Bible, but does God expect us to obey all of them—do they all apply to us? I hope to sufficiently answer this question in the next chapter.

Worship and Our Walk

Before moving on, however, I want to briefly address the object of our worship. This book is about walking worthy of our calling, which is our salvation through Christ by the grace of God. We have looked at our standing before God—as God sees us—and our need for salvation. The subject of walking worthy—living in a manner that is befitting children of God—has been introduced in this chapter. I think it is also important to see what God says about Himself in His word. Why is this?

If we sincerely and humbly believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead—then we are children of God. If we are to walk appropriately as children of God, then we need to have a firm understanding of God Himself because our daily walk is (or should be) a form of worship. If we do not submit ourselves to God, then how can we begin to walk as His children.

Let each of us analyze what we do. Who are we to worship? Is it not obvious? It apparently is not obvious to many brethren. For example, think about the following expressions or responses common among the brethren in word and songs. Do we:

- Say "Praise God" *or* "Praise Jesus" for doing something good;
- Say "Thank you, God" *or* "Thank you, Jesus" for doing something for us or as we requested;
- Attribute something good as being according to the will of God *or* according to the will of Jesus;
- Pray to God or to Jesus; or
- Thank or glorify the Holy Spirit for doing something through us?

There seems to be uncertainty, or at least inconsistency, among brethren. Are we to focus our worship on God the Father, Jesus the Son of God, or both? Are we to worship God the Father, the Son, *and* the Holy Spirit? These appear to be important questions, but does it matter as long as we are worshiping *God*? I believe it does matter, for Scripture says that we are to worship God the Father. A study on this subject is provided in Appendix B, and I hope it is beneficial to you.

> **Now to Him** [*God our Father*] **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:20-21)
>
> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.** (Ephesians 1:3)
>
> **But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (II Thessalonians 2:13-14)
>
> **Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.** (Philippians 4:20)

A Commandment of God

Walking worthy of our salvation is not something that we should disregard or consider not doing. I have referred to Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:1 as an exhortation. He was imploring, or urging, the Ephesian

brethren, and all believers, to walk worthy of their calling because of all that God had done for them through Christ. It was more than an exhortation, however.

I will expound on the authority of Paul as an apostle of God and our Lord Jesus Christ in the next chapter. His exhortations about our walk as believers, which we will explore in the subsequent chapters, are not mere suggestions that we can take or leave according to our desires. Brethren, they are commandments of God that He expects us to obey.

Chapter 4

Using the Word of God Wisely

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [doctrine]**, for reproof, for correction, for training** [instruction] **in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate** [*complete*]**, equipped for every good work.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Be diligent [*endeavor*] **to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

The Word of God

Is the Bible really the word of God or is it just a good book about God? The first passage, II Timothy 3:16-17, establishes the fact that *all* Scripture (the entire Bible) is inspired by God. Through the working of His Holy Spirit, God caused certain men, beginning with Moses and ending with His apostles, to write His truth; no one prophesied or wrote the word of the Lord through their own inspiration or spiritual knowledge (I Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 1:20-21; Ezekiel 13:1-3). This truth exposed the true nature of mankind and our inability to meet God's righteousness through our own efforts; thus, God does not hold back in revealing our sinfulness and the rightful, or just, consequences of our sins (Hebrews 4:12). This truth also revealed God's remedy for our sinful condition—salvation from the consequences of our sins through belief (faith) in His Son's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection.

This passage also confirms that the word of God provides *everything* we need to know in our service to God. Think about this. The Bible is our sole source for knowing what God has done for us and expects of us. God uses pastors and teachers, either directly or through various media, to help us understand His word (Ephesians 4:11-13), but true comprehension comes only when God opens our eyes to understanding (Ephesians 1:15-21; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:44-45). Therefore, we need to evaluate what people teach us, comparing their information with the word of God (Acts 17:10-12; I Timothy 1:3-4; II Timothy 4:1-4).

The second passage, II Timothy 2:15, speaks of accurately handling, or rightly dividing, God's word. This is vitally important, brethren, but what does it mean? Think about all of God's commands and promises in the Bible. In my youth I was taught that every promise in the Bible is mine. Are we supposed to obey all His commands and claim all His promises? For example, should we build an ark, as Noah did in obedience to God, so that we will not die in a great flood (Genesis 6:11-22)? Are we to obey the Ten Commandments and apply the corresponding punishments if we break them (Exodus 19:5-6; 20:1-17)? Are we to sacrifice animals to atone for our sins, as God required of His people in accordance with the Law of Moses (Exodus 29:10-14; Leviticus 1:1-17)? Are we to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins as the people of Israel were commanded to do (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38)? Are we to preach the gospel only to the people of Judea as Jesus commanded His disciples (Matthew 10:5-15)? Are we to expect that God will grant us our prayer requests as Jesus promised (Matthew 7:7-8; 21:21-22; John 14:13-14)? I hope your answer to these questions is "No." Why? Because not all of God's commands and promises are to everyone, and God did not reveal all His plans and requirements at the same time. We need to understand to whom His commands and promises were given and whether they apply to us today. We need to rightly divide the word of truth.

Let us examine this concept through specific examples relevant to this study. In the previous chapters I presented the gospel of salvation and introduced the subject of walking worthy of our salvation. Is this the only gospel in the Bible? Furthermore, is God's word about what is required to be saved the same throughout the New Testament? The answers to these questions are important considering that we are exhorted to walk

worthy of our salvation. Let us start with investigating the scriptural use of the word *gospel* and see where it leads us.

As you will see, I use the word *dispensation* frequently, most often regarding the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:1-3). The word *dispensation* is not a theological term applied by Bible scholars that we should shy away from (as is often taught that we should do) or one that some brethren denounce as false doctrine, but rather it is just an old English word used only four times in the KJV and only in Paul's letters (I Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2; and Colossians 1:25). In the KJV, the same Greek word (*oikonomia*) is also translated as *stewardship* three times in Luke 16:2-4. I still use the word *dispensation* because the KJV was the primary Bible version used by pastors and Sunday school teachers during my youth and it continues to be a good descriptive word for me. Other versions translate the Greek word as *stewardship*, *administration*, *trust* or *trusteeship*, and *commission*. The Bible also uses the similar words *ages* and *generations* to describe how God is dealing with the world at different times (Ephesians 2:7; 3:5, 21; Colossians 1:26). In simple terms, a dispensation in the context of this book covers a period of time during which God is administering, or dispensing, His plan in a particular way.

The Gospel

We are often exhorted in church and by Christian leaders and authors to believe and preach the gospel. What is meant by *gospel*—what is *the gospel*? The English word *gospel* is only used in the New Testament and is derived from the Greek word *ūangelion*, meaning *good news* or a *good message*. A related Greek word, *ūangelizo*, means to announce, proclaim, or preach good news or glad tidings. Therefore, when we read the word *gospel* in our Bible, we know it is talking about good news. But is it always talking about the same good news?

It is not uncommon to hear about the *gospel of Jesus*. What is being referred to? Is it talking about the good news *about Jesus* or the good news *preached by Jesus*? These are two different things. Furthermore, I think it is important to know that the KJV and the NASB never refer to the *gospel of Jesus* in those exact words. There are similar names, as we will see, but I believe that we should know what we are talking about—and in the proper context—when it comes to using Scripture in our service to God.

As noted above, the word *gospel* only appears in the New Testament, and it is described in numerous ways. It is used in the titles of the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in most Bible versions. That is why these four books are often referred to as *the gospel accounts* or *The Gospels*. However, the titles were added by the translators or editors and are not from the original texts. This is not a trivial matter because this usage in the titles implies that all four books describe one gospel from four different perspectives. However, do these books present only one gospel?

In the following table, names or descriptions associated with the word *gospel* are as stated in the KJV, and all the associated references are cited. When different, the equivalent NASB text is noted. You may note differences in the Bible versions you use. Not included in this table are the numerous instances where the word *gospel* is used without a specific modifier—it is simply stated as *the gospel*, *this gospel*, or *that gospel*. Apostle Paul also referred to *my gospel* (Romans 16:25; II Timothy 2:8) and *our gospel* (II Corinthians 4:3; II Thessalonians 2:14), and contrasted his teaching with *another* (or *different*—NASB) *gospel* (II Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6) and *any other* (or *contrary*—NASB) *gospel* (Galatians 1:8). In these cases, the context has to be read to determine the specific gospel name that is being referenced.

Gospel Names in the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible

KJV	Reference	NASB
gospel of the kingdom	Matthew 4:23	same
	Matthew 9:35	same
	Matthew 24:14	same
gospel of the kingdom of God	Mark 1:14	gospel of God[1]
gospel of the grace of God	Acts 20:24	same
gospel of God	Romans 1:1	same
	Romans 15:16	same
	II Corinthians 11:7	same
	I Thessalonians 2:2	same
	I Thessalonians 2:8-9	same
	I Peter 4:17	same
gospel of Jesus Christ	Mark 1:1	same
gospel of Christ	Romans 1:16	gospel
	Romans 15:19	same
	Romans 15:29	blessing of Christ
	I Corinthians 9:12	same
	I Corinthians 9:18	gospel
	II Corinthians 4:4	gospel of the glory of Christ
	II Corinthians 9:13	same
	II Corinthians 10:14	same
	Galatians 1:7	same
	Philippians 1:27	same
	I Thessalonians 3:2	same
gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ	II Thessalonians 1:8	gospel of our Lord Jesus
gospel of His Son	Romans 1:9	same
Christ's gospel	II Corinthians 2:12	gospel of Christ
gospel of peace	Romans 10:15	not in NASB
	Ephesians 6:15	same
gospel of the uncircumcision	Galatians 2:7	gospel to the uncircumcised
gospel[2] of the circumcision	Galatians 2:7	to the circumcised
gospel of your salvation	Ephesians 1:13	same
glorious gospel of the blessed God	I Timothy 1:11	same

The table suggests that there is more than one gospel in Scripture. If so, are they all different gospels or do some gospels have multiple names? Are they all good news for everyone or do some apply only to certain people? I will try to answer these questions, according to my understanding, in the following sections.

[1] In the NASB, *the gospel of God* in Mark 1:14 is about the good news of *the kingdom of God* (Mark 1:15), so both versions are referring to the same gospel.

[2] The words *the gospel* were added by the KJV translators, which correctly conveys the meaning of the verse.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

Two Gospels?

The first mention of the word *gospel* in the New Testament is in Matthew 4:23 where it says that Jesus was proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom*. Prior to that time, John the Baptist was also preaching about the kingdom, and Scripture refers to the beginning of his ministry as the beginning of *the gospel of Jesus Christ* (Mark 1:1). So, we have proclamations about the good news of Jesus Christ and good news about a kingdom. Let us investigate these gospels and see what they are about and if they are different.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Because John the Baptist's ministry preceded that of Jesus, we will address *the gospel of Jesus Christ* first. In Mark 1:2-6, the text explains who John the Baptist was and that, in accordance with prophecy, he was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. Not only did John the Baptist preach about the kingdom (Matthew 3:1-2), but he preached the good news of Jesus Christ.

And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One [*Jesus Christ*] **is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.** (Mark 1:7-8)

What was the good news about Jesus Christ? The good news was that He was the Son of God and that He was coming. Of course, Jesus was already alive when John the Baptist began His ministry, but God had not yet revealed who Jesus was until He was baptized by John. Furthermore, Jesus was the prophesied Messiah (*the Christ*—Matthew 16:16, 20; 22:41-42) and Savior of Israel (Daniel 9:24-26; John 1:41; 4:25-26), as well as King of Israel (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 2:1-2; 21:1-5; John 1:47-51). He was spoken of in veiled terms throughout the Old Testament and was now in the presence of His people of Israel.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I [*God the Father*] **am well-pleased."** (Mark 1:9-11)

And He [*Jesus*] **said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ** [*Messiah*] **to suffer these things and to enter into His** [*God's*] **glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** (Luke 24:25-27)

Therefore, the first good news proclaimed to the people of Israel was that their promised Messiah was coming, and that He was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What was He coming to do? He was coming as King, but king of what? This is what *the gospel of the kingdom* is about. The gospel of Jesus Christ, or the good news *about* Him, is an integral part of the gospel of the kingdom. Before we go any further, here are some things to consider about the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. Did Christ establish a kingdom? No, but why not? What happened? Was it going to be an actual physical kingdom or was it a figurative kingdom (i.e., a spiritual concept)? Was the gospel of the kingdom a false hope? Scripture provides the answers.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

As recorded in Matthew 4:23, Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom to the people (His people—John 1:11) of Israel. It was the same proclamation that John the Baptist made, and the same proclamation that Jesus instructed His disciples to make (Matthew 10:5-8; Acts 1:6). Jesus described many characteristics of this kingdom throughout His ministry. Let us look at a few verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to see what this kingdom is called.

> **Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Matthew 3:1-2)
>
> **From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Matthew 4:17)
>
> **Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of** [the kingdom of] **God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."** (Mark 1:14-15)
>
> **But He** [*Jesus*] **said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.** (Luke 4:43-44)

For reasons I do not understand, the kingdom that was being preached was referred to as *the kingdom of heaven* in Matthew and *the kingdom of God* in equivalent verses in Mark and Luke (e.g., Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43). When this is the case, the verses are speaking of Israel's promised kingdom that was prophesied in the Old Testament. We will see later that the *kingdom of God* is also used in an entirely different sense by Paul.

So, what was the gospel of the kingdom preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His twelve disciples? The good news was that Israel's long-promised kingdom was at hand, or imminent. As foretold by the prophets, the people of Israel were looking forward to when they would be gathered into their promised land, ruled by a righteous descendent of King David, and saved from oppression by their enemies (Ezekiel 36:22-36; 37:15-28; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 1:67-75).

All Israel had to do to receive their kingdom was to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and to believe that their kingdom was imminent (Mark 1:4, 14-15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:37-39). In other words, they had to believe the good news about who Christ was—the Son of God and their Messiah (i.e., *the gospel of Jesus Christ*) as demonstrated by faith through repentance and water baptism—and the good news about their promised kingdom (i.e., *the gospel of the kingdom*). Apostle Peter offered the kingdom to the people of Israel shortly after his proclamation and the miraculous events during Pentecost recorded in Acts 2.

> **"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ** [*Messiah*] **would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him** [*Christ*] **you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you**

who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed [*Christ—Galatians 3:16*] **all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you** [*Israel*] **first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning everyone one of you from your wicked ways."** (Acts 3:18-26)

In accordance with prophecy, the process of receiving their kingdom would include the righteous cleansing of Israel and time of great tribulation that have not yet occurred. However, the prophetic clock (i.e., fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the last days) started with the events associated with the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-23; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7), followed by the appearance of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-3; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1), and subsequently by the appearance of Jesus to His people (Matthew 4:12-17; Isaiah 9:1-2; 60:1-3). We need to remember that all the events recorded about Jesus and His ministry to His people, including His birth, death, and resurrection, were in accordance with prophecy (Luke 24:44-47).

It is important to realize that the kingdom of heaven that was preached is about Israel's *earthly* kingdom and not about heaven itself; that is, it will be a heaven-like or godly physical kingdom on earth. As Jesus conducted His ministry throughout Judea, He explained what the promised and imminent kingdom would be like. His recorded statements in Matthew often began with phrases such as "the kingdom of heaven is like" or "the kingdom of heaven is likened [*may be compared*] to" (e.g., Matthew 13:24, 31, 33). Jesus promised Peter that he would be the leader of the twelve disciples, and that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 16:13-19; 19:28). Christ Himself will rule from Jerusalem—actually new Jerusalem (Revelation 21)—not only as King of the Jews but as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Daniel 7:13-14; Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 27:11; Revelation 17:14; 19:11-16; 21:22-24).

Although it is not clearly differentiated in Scripture, as I understand it there will be two phases of the kingdom. The first phase will include the fulfillment of prophecies about the reestablishment of Israel to its promised land after the rapture, its judgment and cleansing by God, and the war waged against it by *the beast*. The second phase will include the establishment of the heavenly city of new Jerusalem (after God's judgments of the Gentile nations and the earth that culminate in the battle of Armageddon) and the reign of Christ as the King of kings for 1,000 years. Some details of these events are provided in Appendix C.

It is also important to understand that during the first 1,000 years of the kingdom (until all of God's enemies are defeated and judged—Revelation 20:7-15), sinful nations (spared by God during His tribulation judgments) will reside outside of new Jerusalem. We have an example of this situation represented by the magi. The foreign men who followed the *star* to the residence of Jesus were seeking the King of the Jews in order to worship (honor) Him and present gifts (Matthew 2:1-2, 11). They were a type (foreshadowing representative) of the rulers of the nations outside of new Jerusalem who will go to the holy city to pay homage to Christ, the King of kings, whose light will illumine the world (Revelation 21:24-26; 22:14-15). The star the magi followed was perhaps a type of the miraculous light of Christ during the millennium.

Not until Revelation 21 is the kingdom referred to as *new Jerusalem*, but this city is the subject of prophecies concerning the kingdom beginning with the garden of Eden, which is a type (figurative example) of the kingdom (Ezekiel 36:35; Genesis 2:5-17). A few of the features of this kingdom are listed below:

- The *unoccupied* miraculous city will descend out of the heavens (from beyond the earth) as the bride of Christ onto a reconstructed world—a result of God establishing a new heaven and new earth—after God's judgments during the great tribulation that will result in a reconfiguration of the earth's surface as well as the heavens (Jeremiah 30:23-24; Revelation 6:12-17; 8:7-12; 21:1-10).

- New Jerusalem, which will be exceedingly larger than that of Israel during the Old Testament (as apportioned to eleven tribes of Israel), is described as a three-dimensional entity (a cube) with the length of each side being approximately 1,400 – 1,500 miles (Revelation 21:15-16). The height component *may* have something to do with the light of Christ that will illumine the world—there will be no night, at least in the holy city but perhaps in the entire world as it is configured at that time (Revelation 21:22-25; 22:5).
- The city will be surrounded by a wall built on a foundation of precious stones and that will have twelve gates of pearl (Revelation 21:12-14, 17-21).
- New Jerusalem will have dwelling places and one of the streets will be made of gold (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:21).
- The city will become occupied by the believers beginning with Adam who died with a kingdom hope. The children of God who died with the kingdom (earthly) hope will be resurrected and will enter and live in the kingdom. This is the prophesied *first resurrection* (Revelation 20:4-6; Ezekiel 37:11-14; John 6:39-44; 11:24). They will apparently have physical bodies like Jesus had after His resurrection—physical yet spiritual (John 20:19-27; Luke 24:36-43)—and will not marry or have children (Matthew 22:29-30). New Jerusalem will also become occupied by the believers who will survive the great tribulation (Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13-14). They will have fully physical bodies, will marry and have children, and will cultivate the land in some manner (Isaiah 65:17-23; Jeremiah 31:1-5; Ezekiel 34:29; 36:29-30, 34).[3]
- There will be no sin or death inside the city (Revelation 21:4, 27). It will be perfect just as the garden of Eden was made in perfection. Everyone will live according to God's will because they will have the law of God written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-27).
- The resurrected twelve apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-28; Luke 22:28-30). As judges, their role may be that of overseers because there will be no sinful activities in the holy city for them to judge.
- Christ the Lamb of God will reign over the city and the nations of the world (Revelation 21:22-24). All the nations that are spared by God during the great tribulation will continue to be sinful and will reside outside of new Jerusalem. Christ will rule those nations and their people with a rod of iron (i.e., with righteous discipline and judgment—Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5), and the kings will pay homage to Christ who will be the King of kings (Psalm 2:10-12; Revelation 21:24).

These are but a few of the references in Scripture describing the physical and spiritual aspects of Israel's promised kingdom on earth (after the great tribulation) and what it will be like for the people living during that time. For example, the parables of Jesus describe specific aspects of what the kingdom of heaven will be like. Perhaps most believers have been taught, as I was, that this is the *heaven* that we are looking forward to (especially pearly gates, streets of gold, and having my own mansion). But Paul had something different to say about what we—believers in this dispensation of grace—are to look forward to, as we will see in a subsequent examination of the gospel of salvation.

At the end of the millennial reign of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, Satan will be released from the bottomless pit (Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit after being defeated at the battle of Armageddon at the end of the great tribulation—Revelation 20:1-3). He will lead all the nations in a final battle against new Jerusalem, but he and the nations will be defeated by the fire of God from heaven and he will be cast into the lake of fire at that time and for eternity (Revelation 20:7-10). This will be followed by the judgment at the great white throne, when all those who died without Christ will be raised from the dead, judged by Christ as

[3] I am not certain if this statement applies to the first or second phase of the kingdom or to both phases.

guilty for their works (their works will be judged as unrighteous because of their sin), and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Contrary to traditional teaching, the church of this dispensation of grace is *not* the bride of Christ mentioned in verses 2 and 9 of Revelation 21—the bride is new Jerusalem. Furthermore, it is often taught that the new heaven and new earth will be established *after* the great white throne judgment. The events of Revelation 21 and 22, however, occur *before* that judgment—the book of Revelation is not written in chronological order. Those chapters describe the 1,000-year (millennial) kingdom, during which sin and the nations reside outside of new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24; 22:15). There are no prophecies other than in Paul's letters that describe what will happen after the judgment at the great white throne, which is the final prophesied event of the millennial kingdom. I address Paul's prophecies later and in the study in Appendix C.

Other Names for the Millennial Kingdom

We have seen that the promised kingdom is referred to as *the kingdom of heaven* in Matthew and as *the kingdom of God* in equivalent verses in Mark and Luke. The millennial kingdom is referred to as *the kingdom of God* once in the book of John when Jesus explained to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that a person must be born again to enter the kingdom (John 3:1-6). It is called by other names in the New Testament, however.

The millennial kingdom is referred to by Christ as *the kingdom of their Father* (God) in Matthew 13:41-43. He also called it *My Father's kingdom* in Matthew 26:29. It also seems certain that Peter is referring to the millennial kingdom when he tells the Jewish (kingdom) brethren about entering *the everlasting* (eternal) *kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 1:10-11). When Jesus was entering Jerusalem on a colt, the people shouted out that blessed is the coming *kingdom of our father David* (Mark 11:9-10). They were referring to the promised kingdom where the righteous offspring of King David—Christ the Messiah—would rule over Israel (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Jeremiah 30:8-9).

Other Kingdoms

The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God has two meanings in Scripture, and the meanings are determined by the context in which the name is used. We have already looked at its use regarding the prophesied kingdom on earth. However, it is also used to refer to the overall realm of God. Although Christ will be King of kings when He rules from new Jerusalem, God the Father is already King of kings and the Lord of the heavens and the earth (I Timothy 6:15-16; Matthew 11:25; Psalm 47). The passage of I Timothy 6:15-16 is often taught as a reference to Christ as being the King of kings, but the context is describing God the Father who will bring about the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and whom no man has seen or can see (see also I Timothy 1:17). Paul never refers to Christ as our King in his letters (Romans through Philemon) to us who are members of the body of Christ.

It appears that all references to the kingdom of God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the first part of Acts (Acts 1:3-6; 8:12) are referring to the prophesied kingdom on earth. Although Jesus' discourse with the Pharisee Nicodemus was about being born again (John 3:1-15), His ministry was about proclaiming His coming kingdom—a person had to be born again prior to entering the kingdom. However, *every* time Paul referred to the kingdom of God in his letters and as recorded in Acts, he was talking about God's heavenly realm and not the prophesied kingdom (e.g., Acts 14:22; 19:8; 28:30-31; Romans 14:16-17; I Corinthians 15:50; Galatians 5:19-21; II Thessalonians 1:5). As members of the body of Christ, we are already members of that kingdom—we are citizens of heaven and seated in Christ at the right hand of God (Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:4-7).

The Kingdom of Christ

Paul also mentioned *the kingdom of Christ and of God* (Ephesians 5:5) and *the kingdom of His dear* (beloved) *Son* (Colossians 1:13). In these verses and their associated passages, Paul was writing to those who were already members of Christ's—and God's—heavenly realm. In his letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:1-21), Paul was exhorting the brethren to conduct their lives as befitting children of God (i.e., to walk worthy). Paul was reminding the Colossian brethren in Colossians 1:9-14 that God had rescued them from the domain of darkness (sin and death—Ephesians 2:1-7) when He saved them and that they, too, should walk worthy of their salvation.

Finally, Paul also referred to the heavenly realm as *His heavenly kingdom* in II Timothy 4:18. I believe that this verse is referring to God's heavenly kingdom because it is followed by *to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen* (NASB). All other verses with a similar closing phrase refer to God the Father—we are to give Him the glory (e.g., Romans 16:27; Galatians 1:3-5; Philippians 4:20). Although the millennial kingdom will originate from heaven as new Jerusalem and will be ruled by Christ the King, it is never referred to in Scripture as *the kingdom of Christ* or the *heavenly kingdom*.

The Gospel of the Grace of God

Paul the Apostle

We have seen that there are two gospels in Matthew through early Acts: 1) the gospel of Jesus Christ that is about Him being the Son of God and the promised Messiah of Israel; and 2) the gospel of the kingdom regarding the good news of the imminent establishment of Israel's prophesied kingdom on earth. Paul's message was not about Christ as our Messiah or about Israel's kingdom. However, Paul spoke of gospels of many names or standpoints, all but one being under the umbrella of *the gospel of the grace of God*.

> **"But I** [*Paul*] **do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."** (Acts 20:24)

There is much about Paul and his message that is unknown or misunderstood by many brethren. The kingdom required twelve apostles, and Matthias was chosen by the eleven apostles to replace Judas (Matthew 19:27-28; Acts 1:15-26). It is often taught that the apostles should have chosen Paul (i.e., the choice of Matthias was a mistake), but Paul did not meet the qualifications (Acts 1:21-22). The apostles' choice of Matthias was God's choice (Acts 1:24-25). After Israel's continued rejection of God and His Son, culminated by their rejection of the witness of the Holy Spirit by the stoning of Stephen (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18; 7:51-60), God saved Saul (later known as Paul), and appointed him as another apostle—the apostle of the Gentiles. Who was Saul? Why did God appoint another, a thirteenth, apostle?

Saul was a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:11; 22:3) of the tribe of Benjamin of the nation of Israel, and considered to be a leading example among the Jews—a Hebrew of Hebrews (Philippians 3:4-5). He was raised in Jerusalem and educated by the Pharisee Gamaliel, who was a respected teacher of the Law of Moses (Acts 5:34; 22:3). Saul, too, became a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). The Pharisees were a sect of Jews who believed that the people of Israel should be accountable for strictly obeying the requirements in the Law of Moses (at least their interpretation of it—Acts 26:4-5).

Pharisees are not mentioned in the Old Testament; the Levites were chosen by God to administer the Law of Moses and tend to the spiritual needs of the people of Israel (Numbers 3:5-10; Deuteronomy 10:8-9). Pharisees (along with scribes and Sadducees—Matthew 5:20; 16:1-12; 23:1-33) had made themselves into

religious authorities and leaders of Israel. As a faithful Pharisee, Saul considered himself to be blameless according to the righteousness which is in the Law (Philippians 3:6).

In his eyes and in those of his fellow Pharisees, Saul's zealousness in carrying out what he and the other Pharisees considered to be the requirements of the Law of Moses in obedience to God was proven through his persecution of those who were of *the Way*—followers of Jesus (Acts 22:4-5; Philippians 3:6). In fact, Saul's aim was to destroy those people because the religious leaders of Israel considered Jesus to have been blasphemous for claiming to be the Son of God and Messiah of Israel (Matthew 26:57-68; Acts 7:51-60). Beginning with participating in the stoning of Stephen, Saul took pride in his efforts and was feared by the followers of Jesus (Acts 7:58 – 8:3; 9:13-14, 21; 22:3-5; 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13-14).

God had another plan—a plan from before he was born (Galatians 1:15-17)—for the Pharisee Saul. As recorded in Acts 9:1-16, Acts 22:1-16, and Acts 26:9-18, we learn that while Saul was on his way to Damascus to capture and bind all of the followers of Jesus residing there to bring them to Jerusalem for judgment, the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus Christ miraculously appeared (in a bright light that blinded Saul) and spoke to him. It is apparent that Saul soon realized who was talking to him and believed what the Lord told him because he was taken to the home of a disciple in Damascus where he prayed—God had saved Saul by His grace. Saul was informed by another disciple named Ananias that he was a chosen instrument of the Lord and would bear His name before the Gentiles and kings as well as the people of Israel. At some point later, Saul became known by the Greek name of Paul (Acts 13:9).

> **For I** [*Paul*] **would have you know, brethren** [*believers in Galatia*[4]]**, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries** [*Pharisees*] **among my countrymen** [*Jews*]**, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood** [*people*]**, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.** (Galatians 1:11-17)

Paul, therefore, was chosen by God to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1). He had been God's leading enemy (I Timothy 1:15-16) but, by the grace of God, was commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ to preach the word of God to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). But was his message the same as that of the twelve apostles who had also been commissioned by our Lord before His ascension into heaven?

The Mystery

The appointment or choosing by God of another apostle—Apostle Paul—was not needed to fulfill His prophetic plan. However, as God already knew from the beginning that His people (Israel) would reject His Son, He already had a plan—a secret plan—prepared before the world began and ready to reveal in due time. It was now due time, and Paul was chosen to be the dispenser of the gospel of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:1-12) just as Moses was chosen to be the dispenser of God's law to the people of Israel (aka *the Law of Moses*). In doing so, God temporarily set Israel and its kingdom promises aside (i.e., the kingdom of heaven

[4] Galatia was a region that apparently included the cities of Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium, where Paul had journeyed to and preached on more than one occasion (Acts 13:51 – 14:23; 16:1-5).

was no longer imminent as was proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His twelve apostles), which is a condition that remains to this day (Romans 11:25-32).

Paul referred to this secret plan of God as *the mystery*. This mystery had been kept secret in God since *before* the world began—there is not even a hint of it outside of Paul's letters (I Corinthians 2:6-10; Romans 16:25-27; Colossians 1:25-27). Some believe that Genesis 1:1 refers not only to the physical heaven and earth but also to God's plan for the heavens (the mystery) and the earth (the kingdom). However, the mystery truly was hidden in God and not revealed until Paul. Genesis 1:1 is linked with Revelation 21:1 that refers to a new heaven and a new earth after the tribulation judgments in accordance with prophecy.

> **Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages** [world] **to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** (I Corinthians 2:6-8)

> **Now to Him** [*God*] **who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past** [since the world began]**.** (Romans 16:25)

The mystery contrasts with God's prophetic plan, which had been spoken of since the world began, and which concerned His nation of Israel and their future kingdom with Christ as King (Luke 1:68-75; Acts 3:17-26). It is based on the finished work of Christ at the cross: His death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection. Indeed, our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection were prophesied (Luke 24:25-27), but the full and eternal ramifications of His work at the cross were not made known until revealed through Paul.

More information on the mystery and its many components, including how it compares to God's prophetic plan for Israel, is provided in the study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** that is included in Appendix C. That study is part of this book because I earnestly believe that understanding the revelation of the mystery is the key to understanding the entire Bible. The mystery reveals the manifold wisdom of God—it brings everything together (Ephesians 3:8-11). Additionally, I believe that understanding the revelation of the mystery is vitally important in helping us understand why and how God expects us to walk worthy of our salvation.

For now, I think that a little more information on the mystery and how it relates to the gospel of the grace of God is appropriate. The twelve apostles were instructed by Jesus during His ministry on earth and after His resurrection, but prior to His ascension. Paul, however, was instructed by the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ starting with his salvation (Acts 9:1-16; 20:24). Paul refers to other revelations to him by Christ in his letters (Galatians 1:11-12; II Corinthians 12:1-4; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:1-5). We do not know how many times our Lord appeared to Paul in one way or another (he spoke of visions and revelations in II Corinthians 12:1 and he spent some time in Arabia immediately after he was saved—Galatians 1:17), but it is apparent in the book of Acts and his letters that Paul did not receive all the information about the mystery and the gospel of grace all at once.

Paul emphasized that he did not learn the message that he preached from the twelve apostles or any other man, but that Jesus Christ was the author of both the gospel of the grace of God (aka *the gospel of the uncircumcision*, which is addressed later) that was entrusted to Paul and the gospel of the kingdom (aka *the gospel of the circumcision*) that was entrusted to Peter (Matthew 16:13-19; Galatians 2:7-8).

For I [*Paul*] **would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.** (Galatians 1:11-12)

Furthermore, Paul was the only person to whom Christ personally revealed the word of God after His ascension, and the revelation of the mystery fulfilled (completed) the revealed eternal plan of God (Ephesians 3:8-11; Colossians 1:25-27). Yes, the book of Revelation is about the revelation of Jesus Christ, but He communicated it to John *through* the angel of God (Revelation 1:1-2) and not directly as He did with Paul. The book of Revelation fills in the final details of the prophesied last days (which began with the birth of Jesus) and covers the time after the rapture through to the final judgment at the great white throne at the end of the millennial kingdom. Therefore, the book of Revelation has nothing to do with the revelation of the mystery or the gospel of the grace of God. Nor do any of the books after the book of Philemon.

I will refer to an event that has come to be called *the rapture* several times. The word *rapture* does not occur in Scripture, but it is an aptly named event that is included in the revelation of the mystery and, therefore, is described only by Paul. The rapture is more fully described in the study on the mystery in Appendix C, but I will briefly summarize it here.

Now I [*Paul*] **say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable** [corruption] **inherit the imperishable** [incorruption]**. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep** [*physically die*]**, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.** (I Corinthians 15:50-53)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [*physically dead*]**, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.** (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Paul also referred to this future event as our *blessed hope* (Titus 2:11-14). That is, it is an event that we should look forward to and be comforted by. Because the word *rapture* is not in Scripture, the event could be referred to as the mystery of being caught up (into heaven) and changed.

There is much confusion among Christian denominations and individual believers about the second coming of Christ. We have already addressed Christ's return to earth to establish His kingdom—a physical return when He sets His feet on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:1-4). This is the return that the angel spoke about to the disciples when Christ ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-12).

Brethren, our Lord's return for us will be much different. He will not set foot on the earth or judge the nations but will catch us up to meet Him *in the air*—in the heavens—and take us up to His abode. No hint of this event is included anywhere besides Paul's letters because it was part of the mystery—the secret hidden in God since before the foundation of the earth.

The rapture will be the last event of this dispensation of grace. Afterwards, God will resume His prophetic plan for His nation of Israel and the world. We will not participate, therefore, in the cleansing and reestablishment of Israel or the terrible tribulation judgments by God against the nations (I Thessalonians 5:9).

Fundamentals of the Gospel of Grace

So, Paul was chosen to be the apostle of the Gentiles by God and our Lord Jesus Christ. The mystery—God's plan that He had kept to Himself since before the world began—was revealed to Paul by our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. As part of the mystery, Paul was entrusted with the gospel of the grace of God. What is that gospel and is it different than the gospels preached by John the Baptist, Jesus while He was on earth, and His twelve apostles?

Differences Regarding the Gospel

The gospel of the grace of God is probably the centerpiece of the mystery. So, what specifically is the good news? Among other things, the good news includes the following differences from God's prophetic plan and its associated gospel of the kingdom:

- We are saved by the grace of God through faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; Romans 4:4-5). Salvation prior to this gospel was based on faith *plus* works—works (including baptism) were evidence of a person's faith (Mark 1:4; 16:16; Matthew 19:20-22; Acts 2:37-38, 44-45). For example, if Noah had acknowledged that God would send a great flood but had decided that building an ark on dry land was a bit too much to ask, then his faith would have been in vain (not sincere; worthless) and he would have died in the flood. If Abraham had believed God that he would be the father of many nations and yet decided that God was asking too much to sacrifice his son Isaac, then he would have been counted as unrighteous. If people during Jesus' earthly ministry repented of their sins but figured that water baptism or adhering to the Law of Moses were not necessary, then their repentance was in vain (Mark 16:16; Matthew 23:1-3). Obedient works were proof of a person's faith prior to the gospel of grace.
- We are no longer under the Law of Moses—we are under grace (Romans 6:14). The Law, because it is righteous, actually convicted us and condemned us to death (Galatians 3:10-14; II Corinthians 3:6). Thankfully, God took it out of our way through the work of Christ at the cross (Colossians 2:13-14). This truth, about which I will elaborate later, was first revealed through Paul. Jesus had commanded His disciples to continue obeying the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-20; 23:1-3; 28:19-20) and Scripture verifies that they did (Luke 23:56; Acts 21:17-21).
- There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; that is, anyone (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:22, 28). The Jews—the people of God's chosen nation of Israel—do not have any advantage with God in this dispensation of grace. God views everyone as being equally sinful (Romans 3:9)—we are all unrighteous—and everyone has equal access to God through faith in Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection on our behalf (Romans 3:21-23; 10:8-13). God has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to Himself through the shed blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 2:11-18).

There is so much more to the gospel of grace, but these things are very good news for us. Let us look at some other references to gospels that are specific features of the gospel of the grace of God.

The Gospel of Christ

> **Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I** [*Paul*] **come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.** (Philippians 1:27)

I made a point at the beginning of this study that there is not really a *gospel of Jesus* as such in Scripture, but that there are similar names with different purposes. We saw in Mark 1:1-8 where John the Baptist began the ministry of *the gospel of Jesus Christ* regarding the imminent appearance of Israel's prophesied Messiah. This is the only reference in the so-called gospel accounts (Matthew through John) of such a gospel, but Jesus Christ is confirmed as the Son of God and as the Savior and King of the Jews throughout those books. It does not apply to us today because we are not waiting for Christ the Messiah to come and save us from our enemies and to establish His kingdom for us (Luke 1:67-75; Acts 3:17-26).

Paul, on the other hand, has much to say about *the gospel of Christ*, which also goes by the names of *the gospel of His Son*, *the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* (KJV), and *Christ's gospel* (KJV). Please refer to the table near the beginning of this chapter for the associated references. For us, the good news is not about Christ being the Messiah and future Savior of Israel, but what He accomplished for us at the cross, which is the basis or central theme of the gospel of the grace of God.

In fact, the gospel of Christ (and its associated names) appears to me to be another name for the gospel of the grace of God. The good news of Christ is two-fold. First, it was our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ who revealed the gospel of the grace of God to Paul beginning at his salvation and continuing through successive revelations. And second, the gospel of grace is founded on our salvation through Christ's work at the cross. Therefore, the gospel of Christ is about both the good news that He delivered to and through Paul and the good news about our salvation through Him.

The Gospel of Salvation

The gospel of Christ leads to a further explanation about the gospel of salvation. I already presented salvation in Chapter 2 but will expand on that foundation in the context of this investigation of the gospel of the grace of God. The good news about salvation is that despite being dead in sin, God sent His Son to die for our sins. By believing in what Christ did for us at the cross according to the eternal purpose and plan of God, we are saved from the consequences of our sins and God considers us to be righteous in Christ (Romans 5:18-19; 8:10; I Corinthians 1:30). Please consider again passages regarding the gospel of our salvation.

> **Now I** [*Paul*] **make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

> **In Him** [*Christ*]**, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge** [the earnest] **of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own** [purchased] **possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

> **He** [*God*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (II Corinthians 5:21)

Now to the one who works [*for righteousness*]**, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him** [*God*] **who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.** (Romans 4:4-5)

If someone were to ask about the gospel of salvation or how to be saved, the answer is concisely provided in I Corinthians 15:1-4 and repeated in the same sense throughout Paul's letters (e.g., Romans 3:21-26; 4:23-25; 6:3-11; 10:8-10; II Corinthians 5:14-15; Ephesians 1:7, 18-21; Colossians 1:19-20; I Thessalonians 4:14). The gospel of Christ and the gospel of salvation are part of the revelation of the mystery to and through Paul.

Christ's death for our sins was not God's *Plan B* to address the sinfulness of mankind. His sacrifice for us was planned by God from the very beginning because He knew that we would sin before He made us. God apparently made mankind with a free will, and He knew that our free will would be exercised by worshiping the creation rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-25). Our natural, free will that we were born with will *always* choose to sin instead of worship God (Romans 8:1-8; I Corinthians 2:14). This is a sobering truth proven by mankind throughout the ages.

Because God planned Christ's death for us from the beginning, all believers of all ages (dispensations) were and will be saved by Christ's redemptive work at the cross, although this was not known until revealed through Paul (Romans 3:21-26). Now, in this dispensation of grace, it is the good news of salvation for us to believe by faith. Important components of the gospel of Christ and the gospel of salvation, much of which have already been presented but bear repeating for this context, include:

- Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 1:1-6). This was also preached as part of the kingdom message but for a different purpose. Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24; see also Matthew 10:5-7), which were those of His people who would become convicted of their sins and would subsequently repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (as opposed to self-righteous people like the scribes and Pharisees). In accordance with prophecy, Gentiles would be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Christ), who would first redeem Israel (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16; Acts 1:7-8, Isaiah 49:6; Micah 4:1-3). Now, through the gospel of salvation, we learn that Christ, the Son of God, died for everyone without distinction. In this dispensation of grace, salvation is provided without Israel first being redeemed; our salvation is apart from the promises to Israel.
- Christ was sinless but became sin on our behalf (II Corinthians 5:21).
- Everyone is equally guilty before God, and everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, or slave or free person, has equal access to God through faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for us (Romans 3:10-12, 21-26; 11:32; Galatians 3:28). There is *one* gospel of salvation, and it is offered to everyone.
- Those who believe the gospel of salvation are made children of God and heirs in Christ (Romans 8:16-17), are made members of the body of Christ—we are one with Him (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Galatians 3:26-28), have been raised up with Christ and are in Him at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:18-21; 2:4-7), and are sealed by the Holy Spirit—nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39). Furthermore, when we believe the gospel of salvation, God not only reconciles us to Himself and counts us to be righteous in Christ, but He also justifies, glorifies, and sanctifies us because we are in Christ (Romans 5:1, 8-11; 8:29-30; 15:16; I Corinthians 1:2; 6:11).

- When we believe the gospel of salvation, we are transformed from being spiritually dead in sin to being alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). Furthermore, we are made complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10).
- When we believe the gospel of salvation, we become ambassadors (representatives) for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). As such, we are exhorted to walk worthy of our salvation.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We also obtain the sure (certain) hope of eternal life upon belief of the gospel of salvation (Titus 3:4-7; Romans 6:23). All believers of all ages also looked forward to eternal life, so this gospel gives us the same hope. Prior to the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of grace, however, those who believed the message of God looked forward to being resurrected to live forever in the promised kingdom of Israel as previously mentioned. In the meantime, those people are residing in a perfect place referred to as *Abraham's bosom* or *Paradise* (Luke 16:19-23; 23:42-43); apparently, they will not be in the direct presence of Christ until they are resurrected into His kingdom.

For clarification, Jesus told the believing thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus in Paradise *that day*, which would happen after our Lord descended into hell to pay for our sins (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:31). Jesus was spiritually resurrected from hell by God the Father and temporarily entered Paradise to join all the other believers who had died with the kingdom hope (from Adam to that time). However, after His bodily resurrection, Jesus then ascended into heaven to reclaim His glorified position at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Ephesians 4:9-10; Philippians 2:5-11). As I understand it, Paradise will be emptied when the kingdom believers are resurrected to enter the kingdom (new Jerusalem) after the time of great tribulation (John 5:25-29; 11:21-24).

As members of the body of Christ, on the other hand, we are already in Christ at the right hand of God and are promised that when we are absent from the body (through physical death) we are at home with our Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-9; Philippians 3:20-21). Furthermore, we look forward to the rapture when we are either resurrected or caught up to be with our Lord without dying first. Unlike those saved with a kingdom hope, we will not participate in the intermediate step of residing in Paradise. All believers have the promise of eternal life, however, and all children of God will be brought together in Christ after the judgment at the great white throne.[5]

Many believers point to Pentecost as the beginning of the so-called church age; a name most commonly used instead of the age or dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-3; Colossians 1:25-27). However, no church was started at Pentecost—thousands of believers were *added* to the existing kingdom church that Jesus referred to as *the little flock* (Luke 12:31-32; John 21:15-17; Acts 1:13-15). In fact, *there was no gospel proclaimed by Peter and the other apostles at Pentecost*. Instead, they rightfully accused the people (Jews and Jewish proselytes) of killing their Messiah (Acts 2:5-11, 22-23). They were responsible for His death, but God had raised Him from the dead as prophesied (Acts 2:24-36). Yes, Christ's resurrection was good news, but it was not proclaimed as a gospel at Pentecost.

When asked what they should do in response to their actions, Peter exclaimed that they needed to repent (for killing their Messiah) and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-38). There is nothing in Peter's message at Pentecost about Jesus dying for their sins or salvation by believing in His death for them. It was prophesied that the Righteous One (Christ) would bear *the sin of many* and intercede for them through

[5] See the section **The Mystery of God's Will (the Fullness of Times)** in Appendix C for an explanation of this statement.

death (Isaiah 53:11-12), but the context was for His people of Israel because of their sins. Furthermore, there was no prophesied proclamation that people would be saved by believing in His death for their sins.

Brethren, this is an important point because the gospel of salvation (as part of the gospel of the grace of God) was first revealed by Paul. Calling this dispensation of grace *the church age* is only appropriate if we are talking about the church which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). This church, of which all brethren today are members, started with the salvation of Paul (I Timothy 1:15-16) and is a key component of the revelation of the mystery (Ephesians 5:32).

More Differences

As noted earlier, the heavenly kingdom on earth is described extensively, both physically and experientially, throughout Scripture; except, however, in Paul's epistles. He did not tell us about life in the kingdom because we will not be a part of it. Paul briefly summarized, though, some of the events that will happen after the rapture and during the time of great tribulation to help us understand that the rapture will occur *before* the fulfillment of prophetic events of the great tribulation (I Thessalonians 5:1-11; II Thessalonians 2:1-15). He explained these things because false brethren were erroneously teaching the Thessalonian brethren that the rapture either would not occur or had already occurred, and that they would have to experience the wrath of God during the great tribulation (II Thessalonians 2:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:9). Similar false teaching continues today.

After the judgment at the great white throne, Christ will hand the kingdom over to God the Father; that is, His millennial rule will end as there will no longer be any other nations to govern (I Corinthians 15:20-28). This truth was revealed only by Paul. Furthermore, *after* the kingdom is handed over to God, all those in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, will be gathered together in Christ. This truth, also, was disclosed only by Paul and was referred to as *the mystery of His* (God's) *will* (Ephesians 1:9-10).

There is nothing in Scripture that says what it will be like, or what we will be like, once all God's children are gathered together. In my mind, it is possible that this place *may* be a continuation of new Jerusalem on earth because the kingdom was prophesied as an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:32-33; Ezekiel 37:24-28). We do not know this, however, because only the first 1,000 years of the prophetic kingdom are described in Scripture, during which time sin will still exist in the world. It is better to leave such things to God and His wisdom.

Brethren, all those who have been, and will be, saved during this dispensation of grace have no promise to reside in this kingdom, at least not for the first 1,000 years of it. Our hope is a heavenly hope with no physical conditions or constraints (Colossians 1:3-5). Whether through resurrection or through the rapture, our bodies will be changed to be like that of the body of our Lord's glory (Philippians 3:20-21; I Corinthians 15:35-54). Apparently, this will be like His spiritual body after His ascension (as He is in the presence of God) and not like His physical body after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-29). If we believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again, then God considers us to be His children, we are members of the body of Christ, and are already citizens of heaven, seated in Christ at the right hand of God.

The Bible does not say or imply that we, or any of God's children of any age, will occupy new Jerusalem in heaven after we die and then come down to earth for Christ's millennial reign. If it were so, then it seems certain that Paul would have said something about it to prepare us for it. Some teach that it was not necessary for him to talk about us living in the millennial kingdom because it had already been revealed in Scripture. That logic does not hold true, however, because Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles; the Gentiles had no knowledge of God's dealings with, or plans for, Israel. Therefore, if God had intended for the believing Gentiles

(and Jews) in this dispensation to occupy new Jerusalem, then I am convinced Paul would have told them so. We must be careful not to claim the promises of God that are directed specifically to His nation of Israel.

Brethren, contrary to traditional teaching, the church of this dispensation of grace is *not* the bride of Christ mentioned in verses 2 and 9 of Revelation 21—the bride will be the future city of new Jerusalem as described in that chapter. The passage of Ephesians 5:22-32 is often used to prove that the church is the bride of Christ, but please carefully read that passage. Christ is the head of the church which is *His* body—we are all individually members of *His* body (Ephesians 1:22-23; I Corinthians 12:12-27). Paul would not refer to Christ's body in a feminine sense; he never refers to believers as His bride or wife. Instead, Paul was saying that a husband ought to love his wife as his own body, as Christ loves the church that is His body. Paul closed the passage by saying that the fact that we are members of the body of Christ is a great truth of the revelation of the mystery to Paul by our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:32).

As I have attempted to demonstrate, Scripture tells us a great deal about the kingdom of heaven—Israel's promised kingdom on earth. In contrast, God has chosen to reveal to us, through Paul, very little about what heaven will be like for us. What does Scripture say about the heaven of which we are already citizens?

- Heaven is a place of the glory of God—it is His realm (Deuteronomy 26:15; I Kings 8:30; Matthew 6:9). The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).
- While we are at home in the body (alive in the present), we are absent from the Lord. When we physically die, we will be absent from the body and present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-8). Paul never said that we would temporarily reside in Paradise to wait before joining our Lord in heaven.
- As I understand it, after we die our soul and spirit will reside in Christ until such time that God fashions (changes) the body of our physical nature to conform with the body of Christ's glory (Philippians 3:20-21). I am not concerned about the timing of this event, but I know by faith that we will be changed (I Corinthians 15:42-44).
- Whereas the believing Jews who survive the time of great tribulation will enter the prophetic kingdom on earth as physical (flesh and blood) beings who will marry and bear children, Paul revealed to us that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God—His realm (I Corinthians 15:50-53). Our bodies will be changed from physical to spiritual bodies to enter the presence of our Lord.
- In describing the revelations that he received from our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul recalled a time that he was caught up into *the third heaven* (II Corinthians 12:1-4). He did not know if he went there in a physical body or in a spiritual form, but it was a place where he heard inexpressible words that a man is not permitted to speak—the realm of God is incomprehensible to the human mind (Romans 11:33-36). Perhaps it is this *third heaven* (it is not called or described as such anywhere else in Scripture[6]) that is the place we spiritually occupy in Christ as citizens of heaven right now and the place we will reside in after we die.

In truth, I do not know what it will be like for us in heaven, nor am I certain that we will ultimately return to earth after God's judgment at the great white throne at the close of Christ's millennial reign. I cannot find

[6] *Perhaps* the third heaven is also known as the heaven of heavens—the highest of heavens—or the place far above all the heavens (Deuteronomy 10:14; Ephesians 4:10).

this information in the Bible. However, I know it will be glorious, and I look forward to eternity with my Lord and Savior with certainty as my blessed hope. I humbly leave these things to God.

Other Names for the Gospel of Grace

In review, *the kingdom* in the gospel of the kingdom is called *the kingdom of heaven* and *the kingdom of God* in equivalent verses in the books of Matthew through Luke, and John wrote of the same kingdom when he mentioned *the kingdom of God*. In each case, the kingdom is referring to the physical kingdom on earth promised to the nation of Israel. Paul addressed the gospel of the kingdom by another name as we shall see. As we read through Paul's letters, it becomes apparent that the gospel of the grace of God also has more than one name. I believe that each one represents the same gospel from a different perspective.

The Gospel of God

> **Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles** [nations] **for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 1:1-7)

Paul refers to *the gospel of God* on five occasions in his letters. In Romans 1:1-7, he said that he was called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. In this passage, the good news begins by proclaiming that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and descendant of David as prophesied by the Old Testament prophets. At first glance this declaration is similar to that of *the gospel of Jesus Christ* in Mark 1:1, 7-8. However, it goes much further by proclaiming that Christ was declared to be the Son of God through His resurrection—instead of through His baptism (Mark 1:9-11)—and that this gospel would bring about obedience through faith among the Gentiles. Therefore, *the gospel of God* proclaimed in this passage is the introduction to the full gospel of the grace of God that Paul describes in the book of Romans and throughout his letters.

This passage also confirms that our Lord Jesus Christ is the center of both the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God and that both are the word of God. Through the first gospel He proclaimed the imminent fulfillment of the prophesied earthly kingdom to God's chosen nation, and through the second gospel He proclaimed God's previously unrevealed plan to save Gentiles apart from His promises to Israel and its kingdom. I refer to this as the two messages of our Lord Jesus Christ. This sets the stage for the proclamation and explanation of God's hidden plan—the mystery—that is revealed later in the letter to the Romans and elsewhere in Paul's letters.

There is one more important note to make about this passage at the beginning of the book of Romans. How did Scripture progress from addressing the nation of Israel and their imminent kingdom in the accounts of Matthew through John to a letter written by God's former enemy to the Gentile believers as recorded in the book of Romans? There must be an explanation, and it is provided in the book of Acts. That book is more about Israel's rejection of Christ and God turning to the Gentiles than it is about the actions of the apostles as implied by the title *The Acts of the Apostles* provided by the original KJV translators and used by subsequent Bible translators and editors.

The books of Matthew through John close with Israel's rejection of its Messiah by demanding His crucifixion (Matthew 27:11-26; John 19:1-16). In the first part of the book of Acts, Peter and the other apostles

accused the people of Israel of killing their Messiah (Acts 2:22-23, 36; 4:10-12; 5:30-31) and offered them salvation through repentance and baptism for the remission of their sins (Act 2:37-38). Soon after Pentecost, Peter declared that Israel's promised kingdom would be established if the nation repented and returned to God—he was offering the kingdom to Israel in accordance with God's will (Acts 3:17-26). He was reiterating the gospel of the kingdom that was first preached by John the Baptist. A careful study of the book of Acts will reveal that Peter and the other eleven apostles never proclaimed salvation to the people of Israel as believing in the *good news* that Christ died for their sins.

As we progress through Acts after Pentecost, we see the continued rejection of the Messiah by the people of Israel (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18, 40), culminating in the stoning of Stephen who spoke through the demonstrated power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60). In the latter half of Acts, most of the Jews living in Gentile cities also rejected Paul's explanation of who Christ is (as He had been prophesied about in the Law and the Prophets), and Paul correspondingly declared that God was turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:26-51; Acts 18:1-6; 28:16-29). This was a huge shift, but an eternally planned shift, on how God was dealing with mankind. Let us get back to the subject of the gospel of God, however.

The other times Paul wrote of *the gospel of God* refer to his message in general, so I believe that it is simply a shortened version of the gospel of the grace of God (Romans 15:16; II Corinthians 11:7; I Thessalonians 2:2, 8-9). In his first letter to Timothy, Paul reminded him that he (Paul) had been entrusted with *the glorious gospel of the blessed God* (I Timothy 1:11), and that Timothy, also, was entrusted with it (I Timothy 6:20-21). I believe that this gospel is the same as *the gospel of God*.

Peter referred to *the gospel of God* in I Peter 4:17. He was not addressing the gospel of the grace of God because he was committed with the gospel of the kingdom, and his letters were written to kingdom-believing Jewish brethren to encourage them in their suffering for Christ as they waited for His promised kingdom. His reference to the gospel of God, therefore, was about the overall good news of salvation through Christ's resurrection and that the brethren were secure in God despite their suffering (I Peter 1:1-9; 4:12-19; 5:10); their suffering for Christ was proof of their salvation.

By the time Peter wrote this letter he understood that salvation was based on the death and resurrection of Christ, which was not the case when he preached at Pentecost (I Peter 1:1-5). He and the other apostles learned this truth from Paul, who was a friend of Peter and probably wrote the letter to the Hebrews (Galatians 1:18; II Peter 3:14-16). When Peter wrote his letter, however, salvation was still proclaimed as a combination of faith plus works for the kingdom brethren to whom Peter was writing. They had to have faith in who Christ was and in His resurrection, as well as the ultimate fulfillment of the promised kingdom. As proof of their faith, they still had to repent (for killing their Messiah specifically, and for their sins against God in general) and be baptized for the remission of their sins (I Peter 3:21-22). This message of repentance and baptism, just as at Pentecost, will be the means of salvation when God resumes His prophetic plan with Israel after the rapture (Acts 3:17-21; Revelation 1:7; Zechariah 12:10).

The Gospel of Peace

> **Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.** (Ephesians 6:14-15)

Paul refers to *my gospel* (i.e., the gospel that he preached—Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8), which is the gospel of the grace of God, as the gospel of peace in Romans 10:15 (KJV) and Ephesians 6:15. In what sense is the gospel of grace also the gospel of peace?

When the angels praised God for the birth of Jesus, they announced peace on earth (Luke 2:8-14). However, there was no sudden peace because of His birth nor at any time during His sojourn on earth. The people of Israel and the world will know peace *only* when Christ rules in His kingdom as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7; 52:6-7; Micah 4:1-3). The angels' proclamation was prophetic in that there will be peace on earth when Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus confirmed during His ministry that He did not come to bring peace at that time, however, because there would be severe judgment of Israel and the nations before He reigns as King (Matthew 10:34-36).

Brethren, the prophesied peace of Christ's reign will be a political peace. During His millennial reign there will be no wars, even though everyone in the nations outside of new Jerusalem will still be living according to their sin nature and worshiping their own gods (Micah 4:1-5). This is why Christ will rule with a rod of iron; He will judge the nations and their people as needed to preserve peace. Despite the miraculous presence of Christ and new Jerusalem, however, they will not repent and turn to God and will be ready to be organized by Satan for battle against the holy city when he is released from the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:7-9). Brethren, this is *not* the kind of peace that the gospel of peace proclaimed by Paul is about.

Through the revelation of the mystery and the proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God, we learn that all mankind was separated from God because of our sin. From the beginning, mankind worshiped the creature (the creation) rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-25). As part of His eternal plan, God raised up a people for Himself (the nation of Israel through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and provided a means of atonement for their sins and access to Himself by giving them His law—known as the Law of Moses. It explained everything that God considers to be sin and identified the associated sacrifices, offerings, and observances to atone for their sins and to please God. If they endeavored to obey the Law of Moses by faith, their faith and associated works of obedience were counted as righteousness (Exodus 19:5-6; Romans 9:30-33).

What the people of Israel did not know was that the atonement of their sins was based on the *future* redemptive work of Christ at the cross. In reality, however, they were continually obstinate and disobedient, trying to prove their own righteousness but condemning themselves in sin—they proved to be as sinful as everyone else (Exodus 33:3-5; Isaiah 65:1-7; Romans 10:18-21). The passage of Romans 1:18 – 3:20 provides a brief history of the sinfulness of mankind and of Israel, thus establishing (or proving) the need for a savior—our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ (II Timothy 1:8-11).

The Law of Moses was (and is) perfect—it revealed the righteousness of God. Because it is perfect and we are imperfect, it condemned us (everyone) to death. Through Paul, we learned that it killed us (II Corinthians 3:5-6). It was a barrier between us and God, and Christ's work at the cross broke down that barrier (Ephesians 2:11-16). We are no longer enemies of God—we are at peace with Him (Romans 4:23 – 5:2). Whereas Peter accused the people of Israel for killing their Messiah, Christ's death is proclaimed as good news in this dispensation of grace—God has made peace with us despite our sinfulness.

The gospel of peace, therefore, has to do with the good news that God took the Law out of our way and made peace with mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Everyone who believes in Christ's work at the cross for us is at peace with God and are full heirs of God through Christ (Romans 8:14-17). We are no longer children of wrath, but children of God (Ephesians 2:1-7).

> **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction** [access] **by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.** (Romans 5:1-2)

But now in Christ Jesus you [*Gentiles*] **who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups** [*Jews and Gentiles*] **into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances** [*the Law of Moses*]**, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away** [*Gentiles*]**, and peace to those who were near** [*Jews*]**; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.** (Ephesians 2:13-18)

So, the gospel of the kingdom included the good news of the political peace that Israel (and the nations by association) would know during Christ's millennial kingdom. This is not the hope for us in this dispensation of grace—we do not have a promised kingdom and its political peace waiting for us. It saddens me that every Christmas season we hear sermons and sing carols about the peace associated with Christ's birth and declare Him as our King. Brethren, the peace proclaimed at our Lord's birth did not occur then and will not occur until He establishes His kingdom. He will be King of the Jews and the King of kings, but He is not our King today. Proclaiming *the true meaning of Christmas* (which means different things to different people) makes His birth just a *feel-good story* that is easy to disregard because the world knows there is no peace on earth and that Jesus is not reigning as King (literally or figuratively). In God's eternal plan, the hidden purpose or meaning (until revealed by Paul as part of the mystery) of our Lord's miraculous birth was that it led to His death for our sins so that we can be saved from the consequences of our sins and have eternal life in Christ (Titus 3:4-7; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-26).

The gospel of peace revealed through Paul, therefore, explains a fundamental truth of Christ's work at the cross for us. That is, we have peace with God if we believe the gospel of salvation—we are no longer His enemies. There is another kind of peace described in Scripture, though not directly linked to the gospel of peace, that seems appropriate to address here for edification purposes.

Because God has made peace with us and brought us to Himself by His grace, we are also able to know and experience the peace of God in our daily lives. Therefore, not only do we have peace *with* God, He has enabled us to know the peace *of* God. This concept or truth is not limited to believers in this dispensation of grace. All the children of God in all ages have had the ability to realize the peace of God when they yielded to His will. Although he did not know what the outcome would be, Daniel knew the peace of God when he disobeyed the king's decree by praying to God because he knew he was faithfully serving God (Daniel 6:10). Although David's life was often in danger, deep down he knew the peace of God and relied on God for his strength (Psalm 4:8; 119:165). It is God's desire that we recognize His sovereign will (He is in control—Romans 8:26-30; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13), yield the members of our body as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13), and walk worthy of our salvation. By doing so we will know the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable [honest]**, whatever is right** [just]**, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell** [think] **on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me** [*Paul*]**, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:6-9)

The Gospel of the Uncircumcision

After many years during which Paul had been preaching the gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles in cities beyond Israel, Paul, Barnabas (a Jewish coworker), and Titus (a Gentile coworker) went to meet with the spiritual leaders (apostles and elders) of the kingdom brethren in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-29). Paul went to defend his ministry against false accusations perpetrated by false brethren who had spied on Paul and his coworkers. At the time of this meeting, James the brother of Jesus (not one of the twelve apostles) was the leader of the kingdom church in Jerusalem instead of Peter whom Jesus appointed to be the leader of the twelve apostles in the kingdom (Matthew 16:13-19; Mark 6:3; Acts 12:17; 15:13). This change in authority was significant in that it was an indication (probably unrecognized by the Jewish brethren of that time) of the interruption of God's prophetic plan for Israel.

Paul related his message about how God was working among the Gentiles, and Peter supported Paul's testimony by reminding his Jewish brethren how God had worked through Peter regarding the salvation of the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family and friends (Acts 15:6-11; see also Acts 11:9-18). Afterword, the Jewish leaders recognized that God, indeed, was working through Paul to teach the Gentiles. This was also very significant because the Jewish leaders knew from prophecy that the Gentiles were to be blessed through Israel (actually through Abraham's seed—Christ—who would redeem Israel first), and yet they were now being blessed despite Israel's continuing rejection of God and their Messiah Jesus Christ.

The Jewish leaders acknowledged that Paul had been entrusted with *the gospel of the uncircumcision* (as written in the KJV) just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel *of the circumcision* (Galatians 2:7-9). For some background of this terminology, God used the procedure of circumcision, beginning with Abraham, to separate His people from the remainder of the world (Genesis 17:7-14). Circumcision was later incorporated into the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:1-3). In the context of Galatians 2, the word *circumcision* was used to describe the Jews, while *uncircumcision* described everyone else (the Gentiles) who were not descendants of Abraham nor under the Law of Moses (Ephesians 2:11-12). The physical procedure of circumcision, however, has no spiritual significance in this dispensation of grace. In fact, God forbids us from undergoing circumcision *for spiritual purposes*; that is, in obedience to Him or the Law (I Corinthians 7:17-20; Galatians 5:2-6).[7]

The NASB and other Bible versions say *the gospel to the uncircumcised* (Gentiles) and *to the circumcised* (Jews) in the Galatians passage. However, column notes in the NASB indicate that the literal translation is *of the uncircumcision* and *of the circumcision*, respectively. There is a vast difference implied by this wording, and I believe that the KJV text and the NASB column notes are the correct translations.

If the NASB choice of words is correct, then it implies that Paul was preaching the same gospel to the Gentiles that Peter was preaching to the Jews. This definitely was not the case because Peter and the twelve apostles were instructed by our resurrected Lord to continue preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The twelve apostles were operating under the commands of the so-called *great commission* (it is not called as such in Scripture) given to them by Jesus prior to His ascension into heaven (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:4-8). The record in the first part of the book of Acts demonstrates that they were faithfully obeying those commands (e.g., Acts 2:37-47; 3:17-26).

[7] Paul circumcised Timothy, whose mother was a believing Jew, because the Jews who knew him knew that his father was a Greek (Acts 16:1-3). Either Paul had not yet received a revelation that circumcision was no longer necessary, or he was disobedient to God to gain the favor of the Jews. I am not certain about the answer, but I am inclined to believe the latter explanation (Galatians 2:1-3; Romans 7:14-25).

Paul, on the other hand, was instructed by our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel of the grace of God. Therefore, the gospel of the uncircumcision is another name for the gospel of the grace of God, while the gospel of the circumcision is another name for the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the circumcision is the one gospel that Paul mentioned in his letters that is not a part of the gospel of the grace of God.

Brethren, Paul never preached the gospel of the kingdom. It is true that he went to the Jewish synagogues first when he entered Gentile cities, and it is true that he reasoned with the Jewish worshipers about the good news that Christ was the Son of God and the One prophesied as Israel's redeemer (Acts 13:13-37; 17:1-3). He was stating the facts of Christ to people who had been given the prophecies of God concerning Him through the Law and the Prophets. However, he did not follow this introduction of his message by telling the people to repent for killing their Messiah and to look forward to His return to establish His kingdom as the twelve apostles preached. Instead, he explained that they would be forgiven of their sins through belief in Christ's work at the cross and that they were now free from the bondage of the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39)—he taught them the gospel of grace.

Thankfully, some of the Jews in the synagogues believed Paul's message of grace and formed the core of the churches he established in the Gentile cities (Acts 17:4; 18:8). Most of the Jewish worshipers, however, rejected Paul's message, and it is recorded for us in three instances (at Pisidian Antioch, Corinth, and Rome) that, because of their rejection, God was turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-46; 18:4-6; 28:24-28). The Gentiles who overheard Paul's messages at the synagogues, on the other hand, were thrilled to learn that they were included in God's plan of salvation through Christ (Acts 13:48-49).

Perhaps a little more explanation would be helpful. Other than several thousand Jews who did believe the twelve apostles' Pentecost message of Christ the Messiah and His promised kingdom (Acts 2:41; 4:4), the people and spiritual leaders of Jerusalem and Judea as a whole continued to reject Christ as their Messiah. As just noted, when Paul went to the synagogues in Gentile cities most of the Jews and their spiritual leaders also rejected Christ despite his reasoning from Scripture as to who He was. Therefore, in accordance with His eternal (though unprophesied) plan, God temporarily blinded (hardened) the people of Israel to His truth and set the nation and its promises aside (Romans 11:25). Beginning with Paul, God ushered in a new dispensation by revealing His message of grace to Jews and Gentiles without distinction (Ephesians 3:1-12). Israel's blindness by God will continue until after the close of this dispensation of grace, at which time the rest of their prophetic promises will begin to be fulfilled, including the redemption of Israel and the establishment of their promised kingdom with Christ as King (Romans 11:26-29).

The Word of the Cross

I have made several references to our Lord's work *at the cross* for us. Paul referred to his message to us in this dispensation of grace as the word, or preaching, of the cross (I Corinthians 1:18; see also I Corinthians 1:22-25; 2:1-5; Galatians 6:14). It was not about the physical cross on which Christ was crucified, but about everything that God accomplished for us through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—the full ramifications of our Lord's sacrificial and saving work for us (e.g., I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-7, 18-23; 2:1-7; Colossians 2:8-15; Romans 3:21-25; 5:6-11; 6:3-11). The gospel of the grace of God, therefore, is also the word of the cross.

> **For the word** [preaching] **of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing** [*nonbelievers*]**, but to us who are being saved** [*believers*] **it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."** (I Corinthians 1:18-19)

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [*Jews and Gentiles*] **into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances** [*Law of Moses*]**, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.** (Ephesians 2:13-16)

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him [*Christ*]**, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself** [*God*]**, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.** (Colossians 1:19-20)

So, when we think of the cross, we should not divert our attention to a perfect white cross (which is never depicted as such in Scripture) or any representation of the cross (or *tree*—Galatians 3:13) on which Christ was crucified. Instead, we should focus our attention on, and thanksgiving to, our Lord Jesus Christ and His completed work for us.

Other Elements of the Gospel of Grace

Paul further elaborated on the gospel of the grace of God with the following descriptive elements. Without going into too much detail, I will provide what I think they mean.

The Blessing of the Gospel of Christ

In Romans 15:29, we read of *the blessing of the gospel of Christ* as translated in the KJV. This is translated as *the blessing of Christ* in the NASB, which could be understood to imply a different meaning. I am not certain what this verse means, but I will provide a possible explanation assuming that both translations are referring to the same thing. Paul was telling the brethren in Rome that he planned to see them on his way to Spain, and I believe that he was conveying his confidence that he would preach to them the fullness or completeness of the gospel of Christ (aka the gospel of grace) through which we are blessed.

Incidentally, Paul made it to Rome as a prisoner, was later released and ministered to the Jews and the brethren (Acts 28:17-31), and finally imprisoned again and put to death (Philippians 1:12-14; II Timothy 4:6-8). There is no evidence in Scripture that he made it to Spain (known at the time as the Roman colony of Hispania) prior to his final imprisonment in Rome; however, we do not know for sure.

The Mystery of the Gospel

Paul asked the Ephesian brethren to pray for him so that he would boldly speak the truth of *the mystery of the gospel* (Ephesians 6:18-20). As already demonstrated, the gospel of grace is part of the revelation of the mystery by Jesus Christ to Paul. It had been a secret hidden in God (and not veiled in prophetic Scriptures) since before the world began. The revelation of the mystery and the gospel of grace actually fulfilled (completed, or made full) the word of God, and Paul was chosen by God to reveal it to the world (Ephesians 3:8-12; Colossians 1:5-6, 25-27).

The Faith of the Gospel

In Philippians 1:27-30, Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and that in doing so they stand firm in one spirit and with one mind (being like-minded) striving together for *the faith of the gospel*. This exhortation was meant to help them endure the consequential persecution they were experiencing (see also II Timothy 3:12). Paul refers to his message—the gospel of the grace of God—as the word of faith or as *the faith* (Romans 1:5; 10:8-10; Galatians 6:10; I Timothy 1:2;

II Timothy 4:7). I believe that the faith of the gospel, therefore, is referring to the truth of the gospel of grace, for which we should stand firm.

The Word of the Truth of the Gospel

Paul was thankful to God that *the word of the truth of the gospel* was bearing fruit and increasing among the Colossian brethren (Colossians 1:3-6—KJV). The word of the truth of the gospel (translated as *the word of truth, the gospel* in the NASB) may be referring to the same thing as the faith of the gospel. Throughout his ministry Paul had to defend his apostleship and message, both to the kingdom believers in Jerusalem and the people to whom he ministered (Acts 15:1-12; II Corinthians 11:1-33). Why was this? It was because what he was teaching was new to the kingdom brethren—it was not what Jesus had taught them and was not in accordance with prophecy.

As for the people he ministered to, some of the Jews who heard his message may have struggled the same way as those in Jerusalem (nonbelieving Jews rejected it entirely), and the Gentile brethren often exhibited their pride and jealousy—they wanted to disregard or usurp his authority (I Corinthians 4:1-21; Philippians 1:15-17). On the other hand, Paul was thankful to God for the Colossian and Thessalonian brethren (and others) who received his message as the word of God—the truth of God (Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 1:13-14)—rather than as the word of man (I Thessalonians 2:13). We should also regard Paul's letters and his message as the word of God—the truth.

The Hope of the Gospel

Paul exhorted the Colossian brethren to be steadfast and not move away from *the hope of the gospel* (Colossians 1:21-23). When we read the word *hope* in Scripture, we need to understand the context in which it is used—often it is referring to something that is certain instead of something that a person hoped might occur (e.g., Romans 5:1-2; 15:13; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 1:18-21; Colossians 1:25-27; I Thessalonians 5:8; Titus 1:1-2). In this passage, Paul was reminding the Colossian brethren that prior to salvation they were slaves of sin and alienated from God—they were without hope (see also Ephesians 2:11-13; I Thessalonians 4:13). As believers, however, they were reconciled to God through the death of Christ and counted as holy and blameless before God (see also Ephesians 1:3-8). This message of the grace of God was a certain hope that they could count on and was a reason to stand fast (unwavering) in the faith. It is a certain hope for us, too.

The Everlasting Gospel

There is also *the everlasting gospel* (translated as *an eternal gospel* in the NASB) preached by an angel of God as recorded in Revelation 14:6-7, but it has nothing to do with the gospel of grace. This angelic proclamation appears to be referring to the glory of God and His sovereignty, which is eternal. This will be good news to the believers in the time of great tribulation because they will know that God's judgments on the nations and earth are about to begin, thus setting the stage for Christ's return to earth to establish His kingdom. It will be bad news, however, for those who will not heed this gospel—they will not fear God and will be judged by Him. Most people of that time will reject this eternal gospel about the glory of God because they will have already rejected the gospel of the kingdom that will be preached by the chosen (sealed) bondservants of God (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5).

Concluding Thoughts on the Gospel

As we have seen, there is more than one gospel in Scripture. Except for *the everlasting gospel*, all the various names of gospels fall under two primary gospels: *the gospel of the kingdom* and *the gospel of the grace of God*. The gospel of the kingdom is the same as the gospel of the kingdom of God and the gospel of

the circumcision and includes the gospel of Jesus Christ that is about Him being the Son of God and Israel's Messiah. It was preached by John the Baptist, Jesus while He was on earth, and His twelve apostles, and was directed to the people of Israel beginning in Jerusalem.

The gospel of the grace of God is part of the revelation of the mystery to Paul by our risen, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same as the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of His Son, Christ's gospel, the gospel of peace, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and the gospel of the uncircumcision. Furthermore, it is called the word of the cross and includes the gospel of our salvation. It was preached by Paul and his coworkers, first to the Jews in the synagogues of Gentile cities but was primarily directed to the Gentiles because Paul was appointed by God as the apostle of the Gentiles.

Some of the differences between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace of God have been addressed in this study, including the following:

- The gospel of the kingdom is the good news about Israel's promised earthly kingdom with Christ reigning as the King of kings, whereas the gospel of grace is about the good news of God bestowing salvation and eternal life on all who believe in Christ's work at the cross for us.
- To be saved under the gospel of the kingdom a Jew had to repent of his sins and be baptized for the remission of sins (faith plus works), whereas under the gospel of the grace of God we (no difference between Jew and Gentile) are saved by believing the gospel of salvation. The good news for us is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again; we are saved by the grace of God apart from works.
- A believer under the gospel of the kingdom was still required to be obedient to the Law of Moses, whereas under the gospel of grace the Law has been taken out of our way.
- The gospel of the kingdom was set aside when Israel was set aside because of its unbelief and was replaced by the gospel of the grace of God that is still God's dispensation today.

There are many other differences involving such things as baptism, prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, possessions, etc. These differences are described elsewhere in this book.

My hope is that when you hear or read something about *the gospel*, you will question in your mind which gospel is being talked about and if it is the gospel that applies to us today in this dispensation of grace. Too often the gospels are mixed up or used out of context, and the good news of the grace of God is watered down or lost in the confusion. We need to endeavor to accurately handle, or rightly divide, the word of truth so that we can be good ambassadors for Christ by standing firm in the gospel of the grace of God and walking worthy of our salvation.

> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He** [*God*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** [*Christ*]**.** (II Corinthians 5:20-21)

> **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.** (I Corinthians 15:58)

Law and Grace

I have gone into some detail explaining the gospel—what it is and how it is used in Scripture. I have also introduced the scriptural division of prophecy (that which was revealed by God or spoken by His Prophets since the world began) and the mystery (that which was hidden in God since *before* the world began until

revealed to us through Apostle Paul). The purpose of all this has been to show that although all of Scripture is *to* us, it is not all *for* us. Stated another way, all of Scripture is God's word and is of benefit to us, but we can only follow the instructions and claim the promises that are directed to the members of the body of Christ. Thus, we have the exhortation and need to rightly divide the word of truth, which is the word of God (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17).

I believe that the division between prophecy and the mystery is the most important division of the Bible. Through them God has revealed His eternal plan for both the nation of Israel (including the people God saved before He established the nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and members of the body of Christ. Within that division is the Law of Moses, which is part of prophecy, and the gospel of the grace of God, which is part of the mystery. Therefore, I want to briefly examine the Law of Moses and why it is not part of God's plan for this dispensation of grace.[8] This understanding is important if we are to know what God expects of us to walk worthy of our salvation.

Many believers—children of God—believe that we are to obey the Ten Commandments and at least parts of the rest of the Law of Moses to some extent (e.g., tithing, dietary laws, observances of the sabbath, Passover, or other holy days, etc.). Most of us realize, however, that we are not supposed to offer sacrifices for our sins because we know that Christ paid that penalty for us. Regardless, there appears to be confusion among brethren on the matter of obedience to the Law of Moses. What does Scripture say?

The Law of Moses was God's righteous law to His people of Israel revealed through His prophet Moses; God commanded the people to obey it (Exodus 19:5-6; 24:12; Deuteronomy 4:1-8; Luke 2:22-24; Matthew 5:17-20; 23:1-3). It is presented, described, and reiterated from Exodus 20 through the book of Deuteronomy. It consists of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 10:4) as well as the specific judgments associated with breaking them, descriptions of nearly all sins and associated consequences, what is considered *clean* and *unclean* (including dietary restrictions), sacrifices, peace and thanksgiving offerings, tithing, observances (holy days, months, and years), and other worship requirements.

> **"See, I** [*Moses*] **have taught you** [*the people of Israel*] **statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation** [*Israel*] **is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"** (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

> **Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded an iron tool, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. He wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he** [*Moses*] **had written, in the presence of the sons** [children] **of Israel.** (Joshua 8:30-32)

The Law of Moses included, and was summarized by, the following commandments restated by Jesus as "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5), and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31; Leviticus 19:18).[9] That

[8] See my study **The Law of Moses** that explains the Law and how it compares to the gospel of grace.
[9] These commandments are examined in the next chapter.

is, if a person genuinely kept these two commandments, then all the others would automatically be kept. Besides Christ Himself, has anyone ever kept these commandments (Matthew 5:17; II Corinthians 5:21)? No.

> **But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher** [Master]**, which is the great commandment in the Law** [*of Moses*]**?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."** (Matthew 22:34-40)

The Law of Moses is righteous, and *no one* could keep these two commandments, let alone the entire Law, because of our sin nature. Because the Law is righteous and we are not, it was a curse not only for the people of Israel but for the whole world—no one could attain the righteousness of God (Galatians 3:10-14; Romans 3:9-10, 19-23). In truth, the Law killed us because it condemned us in our sin (II Corinthians 3:6). Only those who believed that the Law was the word of God, humbly acknowledged their sinfulness and inability to attain righteousness through their own works, and sincerely tried to obey it by faith in obedience to God were adopted as children of God. Moses and some of the people of Israel after him understood this (e.g., Psalm 32:1-2).

The people of Israel could not keep the Law given to them by God, so what hope did they have? Although the Law of Moses proved that no one can appease God on their own terms, it was and remains perfect. When God redeems His people of Israel and establishes their prophesied kingdom on earth, they will automatically keep these two commandments (and, therefore, the entire Law of Moses) because the Law will be written on their hearts—they will be miraculously changed to sinless people (Ezekiel 36:22-28; 37:24-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13; I John 3:4-10). Brethren, we do not have such a promise in this dispensation of grace, and we will continue to sin as long as we have bodies of flesh; that is, until we are with our Lord in heaven (Romans 7:14-25; I Corinthians 15:50-57).

We are not to try to keep parts of the Law of Moses, because then we would be obligated to keep the entire Law (Galatians 3:10; 5:1-6). Through Paul our apostle, we learn that the Law of Moses was taken out of our way—it was figuratively nailed to the cross with Christ (Galatians 2:21; 3:10-13). In his letters to the Roman and Galatian believers, as well as in some of his other letters and in the book of Acts, Paul emphasized that we are no longer under the Law of Moses in this dispensation of the grace of God (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 6:14; 7:6; 8:1-4; Galatians 3:19-26; Ephesians 2:11-16).

> **When you were dead in your transgressions** [sins] **and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He** [*God*] **made you alive together with Him** [*Christ*]**, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us** [*i.e., the Law*]**, which was hostile to us; and He** [*God*] **has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.** (Colossians 2:13-14)

> **Now we know that whatever the Law** [*of Moses*] **says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed** [*silenced*] **and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation** [*atoning sacrifice*] **in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins**

previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:19-26)

But what about the Ten Commandments? I was taught that, at the very least, we are to keep them. Brethren, we are not bound to the Ten Commandments, either, because they are part of the Law of Moses. That does not mean that principles of the Ten Commandments or other parts of the Law do not apply to us. For the sake of clarification, however, let us take a brief look at the Ten Commandments.

A fact often overlooked by many believers and others who claim that we should obey the Ten Commandments (and that our nation's laws should be based on them) is that the punishment for disobeying *four* of the commandments was the death penalty. These are breaking the sabbath requirements (Exodus 31:15), striking or cursing your mother or father (Exodus 21:15, 17), murder (Exodus 21:12), and adultery (Leviticus 20:10). Bearing false witness could also result in the death penalty, if such false testimony resulted in the unjust death of another person (Deuteronomy 19:18-21). There were consequences associated with breaking the other commandments as well, and I have included in the following list a representative reference (in italics) after the initial commandment reference from Exodus 20:3-17 (in some instances, the consequence is included with the commandment).

Although we are not under the Law of Moses and subject to its associated penalties, the intent and purpose of nine of the commandments (excluding keeping the sabbath) were true before the Law was instituted and continue to hold true for believers in this dispensation of grace. They are unchanging principles of God, and He expects His children to believe them and live accordingly.

- **First commandment:** You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3; *Deuteronomy 6:14-15*). This principle applies to us (Galatians 4:8-9). This commandment seems straight forward, and most believers likely think that they are being obedient. However, it is closely tied to the second commandment for which many of us are guilty of disobeying, thereby demonstrating that we are being disobedient to this commandment.
- **Second commandment:** You shall not make yourself an idol or worship idols (Exodus 20:4-6; *Exodus 20:5*; see also *Exodus 32:34-35*). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 8:1-6). Unfortunately, many brethren have obsessions that can be likened to idol worship. Our lives show that we essentially consider many things on the same level with, or even above, God—we cannot seem to live without them, and they have a controlling influence over us. Our modern idol worship can consist of obsessing over or paying homage to angels, persons in the Bible other than God and our Lord Jesus Christ, personal fame, celebrities, athletes, political figures, money, pets, nature, guns, technology, our constitutional rights or perceived Christian rights, and even our nation and its flag. We need to take an honest look at ourselves regarding obsessions—do they replace or compete with our worship of God?
- **Third commandment:** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Exodus 20:7; *Deuteronomy 5:11*). This principle applies to us (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; Ephesians 4:29-30; 5:6; II Timothy 4:3-4). Most of us realize that using God's name (or *Christ* or *Jesus*) in a curse against someone or something is wrong (yet many of us do it anyway). However, please consider that taking any oath in the name of God is also wrong (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). Furthermore, attributing something to God that is contrary to, or in addition to, the written word of God, including perceived revelations received through *a whisper in my ear* or through an imagined or fabricated dream, vision, or other special means (Colossians 2:18) is also using God's name in vain because God's word to us is complete (Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 3:8-12; II Timothy 3:16-17;

Revelation 22:18-19). Indeed, anyone saying that we should obey the Law of Moses, or even parts of it, is also taking the name of God in vain (Galatians 1:6-12; 3:1-3).

- **Fourth commandment:** Keep the sabbath day holy (Exodus 20:8-11; *Exodus 31:15*). The sabbath was instituted by God prior to the giving of the Law (Exodus 16:22-30) and was incorporated into the Law with a specific set of requirements (Exodus 20:9-10; 31:12-16; 35:2-3; Numbers 15:32-36; 28:1-3, 9-10; Leviticus 23:1-38; 24:1-8).[10] The Law of Moses contains holy days, weeks, months, and years (including the sabbath year—Leviticus 25:1-7) that Israel was commanded by God to observe as stipulated. However, contrary to Christian traditions that I will address in subsequent chapters, there are no sabbath days or *any* other holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years to observe in this dispensation of grace (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17). Please think about this one because most brethren do not understand that this is the case and, therefore, disregard Paul's admonitions regarding holy observances.
- **Fifth commandment:** Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12; *Exodus 21:15, 17*). This principle applies to us in the context of children obeying their parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20), but it is complicated and I will share my thoughts on it. This is the first commandment with a promise (Ephesians 6:2-3), signifying its importance, but the promise does not apply to us in this dispensation of grace—we do not have an earthly kingdom hope as Israel did. So how does the principle apply to us?

  There is a difference between children who are still under the care of their parents and adult children. The Law of Moses was not directed to children under the care of their parents because it was the parents who were to teach their children (Deuteronomy 4:9-10; Proverbs 22:6). The command to honor their father and mother, therefore, had more to do with adult children giving their parents their due respect and heeding their instructions (i.e., making decisions based on what they were taught) rather than obeying them as a child was expected to do (Proverbs 1:8-9; 6:20-21). Dishonoring a parent included cursing or striking a mother or father, which were subject to the death penalty. Even an intentionally rebellious or belligerent adult son was to be put to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

  Believing children in this dispensation of grace are commanded to obey their parents in the Lord for this is the right thing to do. In the context of Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20; I believe this command by Paul is directed to children still under the care of their parents. When we were children most of us disobeyed, and some of us cursed, our parents. In fact, disobeying and testing our parents appears to be natural because we start before we can even talk. As older children, we need to recognize this behavior as sin and endeavor to do what is right. This commandment, however, even in principle can be especially difficult to obey for those with parents who are not worthy of our love and affection due to neglect or to physical or emotional abuse. As parents we are to raise up our children in truth and love, and discipline them as needed to correct their behavior just as God disciplines us (Proverbs 13:24; 22:6; Hebrews 12:4-11). Therefore, I believe the greater responsibility lies with the parents. As believers who are parents, we should never treat our children in such a way that would cause them to lose hope or drive them to want to disobey or separate from us (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4).

[10] See Chapter 5 of my study **The Law of Moses** that examines the sabbath.

- **Sixth commandment:** You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13; *Exodus 21:12*). This principle applies to us (Romans 1:28-32; I Timothy 1:8-11). We need to remember that wishing someone was dead or even hating someone is considered by God as the same as murder (Matthew 5:21-22).
- **Seventh commandment:** You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14; *Leviticus 20:10*). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 6:9-10). Even looking at one who is not our spouse with lustful thoughts is the same as adultery (Matthew 5:27-28).
- **Eighth commandment:** You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15; *Exodus 22:1-9*). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:28). We may think that we do not steal, but do we manipulate our taxes illegally or to our unethical advantage, falsify our timecards, use employer materials for unauthorized personal use, or have a personal bank account that our spouse is unaware of? What other ways do we steal?
- **Ninth commandment:** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16; *Deuteronomy 19:18-21*). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:25, 31). This has always been a common problem that we demonstrate through starting or spreading rumors or by speaking falsely (lying) about others to gain revenge or an advantage for ourselves. The use of social media has made it even easier to do these things.
- **Tenth commandment:** You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17). This principle applies to us (Romans 7:7-8; 13:8-9; Hebrews 13:5). Coveting is a subjective state of mind—a conscious thought or desire. Therefore, this commandment does not have a specified punishment associated with it in the Law of Moses. The Bible, however, does talk about the consequences of coveting, greed, and unjust gain (Psalm 10:3-4; Proverbs 11:6; Isaiah 57:17; Mark 7:20-23; Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5-7; II Peter 2:1-3). Coveting is our desire to have something that belongs to someone else and can quickly lead to other sinful actions directly addressed by prior commandments of the Ten Commandments such as stealing, adultery, murder, and bearing false witness. Perhaps that is why it is the last commandment.

  The love of money—a form of greed—is also coveting because it drives us to want more of it regardless of how we get it. It is the root of many of our problems (I Timothy 6:6-10) as demonstrated by living above our means, through our gambling or gaming activities, participating in get-rich-quick schemes, or supporting an unethical, immoral, or illegal lifestyle. God has promised to provide for our needs if we depend on Him (Philippians 4:18-19; II Corinthians 9:6-11) and we are exhorted to be content with what we have (I Timothy 6:7-8).

Please consider again that Jesus told His people, to whom the Law of Moses was given and directly applied, that the entire Law is summed up by the commandments to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, and to love their neighbors as themselves. How do these two commandments do this? Loving God with all their means covered the first four commandments, while loving their neighbors covered the last six commandments. So, if they truly did both of these things (which they did not do because of their sin nature), all the details of the rest of the Law of Moses would automatically be obeyed.

If no one (Jews or Gentiles) could keep it, why did God give the Law—His Law—in the first place? Not until Paul was it definitively revealed that the Law was provided to show us our sin (through the Law we have the knowledge of sin—Romans 3:19-20) and that we are unable to attain the righteousness of God through our own works (e.g., by completely obeying or fulfilling the Law—Romans 3:21-26; 4:4-5). Besides showing us what sin is, Jesus told His disciples and His people of Israel that the Law of Moses is broken by not just outwardly disobeying the requirements of the Law but also by the sinful intent of the heart (Matthew 5:21-22,

27-28). Because the Law condemned all people to spiritual death, we needed Christ's sacrifice for us to obtain the righteousness of God and eternal life through faith (Romans 5:6-11; Titus 3:4-7).

> **Why the Law** [*of Moses*] **then? It was added because of transgressions** [*sins*]**, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed** [*Christ*] **would come to whom the promise had been made.**[11] **Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law** [the *Law*]**. But the Scripture has shut up** [concluded] **everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law** [*Law*]**, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.** (Galatians 3:19-25)

Brethren, we must be careful how we use the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses (I Timothy 1:8-11). We are not to literally obey it, or even parts of it, because God has taken the entire Law out of our way. The Galatian brethren, who were personally taught by Paul and understood the gospel of the grace of God, were persuaded by false brethren to put themselves back under the Law to be justified by their works. Paul was very upset by this and did not hold back in telling them they were foolish for doing so because they were disobeying the word of God (Galatians 3:1-3; 4:19-20). We are no longer under the Law but under grace.

> **But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.** (Romans 7:6)

> **Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law** [*of Moses*] **could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement** [righteousness] **of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** (Romans 8:1-4)

Rightly Divide the Word of Truth

I hope I have adequately demonstrated that we need to be careful how we use the word of God. Brethren, we must rightly divide—handle accurately—the word of truth to know and understand what God has revealed to us. We have seen that there is more than one gospel in Scripture and that the gospels associated with Israel's promised kingdom do not apply to us today. We have seen that God first revealed His prophetic plan (beginning in Genesis 1:1) and later revealed His hidden plan—the mystery (through His Apostle Paul). We have seen that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under the dispensation of the grace of God. The purpose of this effort has been to establish the foundation for what God expects of us in our daily service to Him—what we are supposed to do to walk worthy of our salvation.

In the next chapters, we are going to see what the Bible says about our daily walk. We will draw from Paul's letters and provide supporting Scripture from other parts of the Bible as applicable. We will also look at roadblocks to walking worthy of our salvation, including those involving sin as well as those involving a misunderstanding of the differences between prophecy and the mystery, and between the Law and grace.

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[11] See Genesis 22:15-18 regarding God's promise to Abraham.

Chapter 5

Walk in Love

Therefore be imitators [followers] **of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.** (Ephesians 5:1-2)

The Cornerstone of Our Walk

It is now time to begin examining Scripture to see what God expects of us regarding walking worthy of our salvation—living each day according to the will of God. Many of us are seeking the will of God in our lives but often forget, or maybe do not fully realize in the first place, that God has already revealed to us what He expects of us. Brethren, if we really want to please God, then we need to read His word and endeavor to obey it. As presented in the previous chapter, however, we need to rightly divide Scripture to make sure we are following the instructions that God intended for us as members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of His grace.

In the next few chapters, I will address at least some of the things that we should understand and do. We will begin by seeing what it means to walk in love as exhorted in the passage above. I hope to show that if we are walking in love, it will be easier to do all the other things that we ought to do. Consequently, we will look into this subject in some depth. As with everything else in this book, this examination will be as I understand it and from my perspective. It is not intended to be an exhaustive study on love; I leave it to you to search the Scriptures with the guidance of the Holy Spirit for your own understanding. So, what does it mean to walk in love?

If, or because, our salvation through the work of Christ on the cross for us is our foundation for a worthy walk, then I believe that love is the cornerstone of our daily walk. In the opening passage, we are told that if we are to follow God as His own children, then we should walk in love demonstrating the same love that Christ showed us by dying on the cross for us. Therefore, our walk in love is directly linked to God's love for us that He demonstrated by sending His own Son to die for our sins. Paul went on to say that Christ's death for us was pleasing to God as a fragrant aroma.

The phrase *a fragrant aroma* (*a sweetsmelling savour* in the KJV) is an interesting choice of words. Paul used it in other letters in the context of the manifestation of Christ's work through us and as a fully satisfying gift (II Corinthians 2:14-16; Philippians 4:18); otherwise, it only appears in the Old Testament. The phrase was used as a figure of speech signifying that something was very satisfying or pleasant. In our passage, Christ's death for us was an offering and sacrifice to God, which satisfied His full payment or atonement—His righteous requirement—for our sins. In the Old Testament it is sometimes used to signify that an animal sacrifice performed in accordance with God's instructions and with the right purpose and attitude satisfied His requirement for the atonement of sins (e.g., Leviticus 1:1-9; 4:27-31).

We find in Paul's letters that those sacrifices foreshadowed the future sacrifice of Christ for our sins. His death for us was a propitiatory sacrifice in that He paid the penalty for sin instead of us paying the penalty, which is spiritual death and eternal separation from God (Acts 2:22-36). Consequently, Christ's death met God's requirement for the atonement of all the sins of His people for all time—past, present, and future (Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 10:11-14). Everyone who believes the gospel of salvation, therefore, has all their sins forgiven through the shed blood of Christ—we were bought with the price of Christ's death for us (Ephesians 1:7; I Corinthians 6:18-20). Brethren, this is love.

He [*God*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** [*Christ*]**.** (II Corinthians 5:21)

Paul, therefore, drew from Old Testament phraseology to help explain God's love for us and the need for us to walk in love as the children of God ought to do. He even reiterated the following commandment from the Law of Moses to exhort us even further to walk in love. Remember from the previous chapter that we are no longer under the Law of Moses in this dispensation of grace, but also that many principles of the Law apply to all children of God of all dispensations (from Adam to the future).

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Most of us are familiar with the phrase *love your neighbor as yourself*. It comes from the Bible. I was either taught or I simply assumed that the phrase meant or implied that we are to love others as we love ourselves. However, the phrase as it appears in the Bible does *not* end with the words *as you love yourself*.

What does this well-known phrase mean? Who is our neighbor? How are we to love our neighbor? Am I to love my neighbor as I love myself? This chapter presents my thoughts on the meaning of this phrase, based on my understanding of the Bible references that are included, and how it applies to walking worthy of our salvation.

There are eight passages in Scripture that contain the phrase *love your neighbor as yourself*. The first appearance is part of a commandment of the Lord God to the people of Israel through His prophet Moses. Therefore, it is part of the Law of Moses.

"You shall not hate your fellow countryman [brother, *Israelite*] **in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him** [*share in his guilt*]**. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons** [children] **of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."** (Leviticus 19:17-18)

Jesus used this phrase in four passages in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. On the first occasion He answered a question by associating loving our neighbor with the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:16-19). The other three occurrences may all be equivalent passages that refer to another occasion where Jesus answered a question from a teacher of the Law of Moses by saying that the Law is summed up or fulfilled by loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28).

And someone came to Him [*Jesus*] **and said, "Teacher** [Good Master]**, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good** [that is, God]**; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor Your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** (Matthew 19:16-19)

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher [Master]**, which is the great commandment in the Law** [*of Moses*]**?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."** (Matthew 22:34-40)

One of the scribes [*teachers of the Law of Moses*] **came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is** [like] **this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."** (Mark 12:28-31)

And a lawyer stood up and put Him [*Jesus*] **to the test, saying, "Teacher** [Master]**, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law** [*of Moses*]**? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and** [*love*] **your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."** (Luke 10:25-28)

This phrase also appears in the book of James. In this instance, James was saying to kingdom believers of Israel and to those who professed to be believers (false brethren from among the people of Israel) that if a person did not love his neighbor as himself, then he was guilty of transgressing the entire Law of Moses.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law [*Law of Moses*] **as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He** [*the Lord God*] **who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.** (James 2:8-11)

Apostle Paul used it twice in his letters, specifically to the believers in Rome and the region of Galatia. In both instances he was exhorting the brethren—members of the body of Christ—to love one another because love is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. To the Galatians brethren, who were being misled to put themselves back under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-3), Paul equated loving our neighbors as ourselves with our freedom, or liberty, that we have in Christ. Paul was referring to freedom from the bondage and curse of the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-14; 4:21-31) and that, even though we are no longer under the Law, we should not take advantage of our freedom and continue to intentionally sin and live under its control (Romans 6:1-19).

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law [*of Moses*]**. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.** (Romans 13:8-10)

For you were called to freedom [liberty]**, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law** [*of Moses*] **is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** (Galatians 5:13-14)

So, we have seen that the phrase *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* first appears as a commandment in the Law of Moses and then is used by Jesus and Paul to say that it sums up the entire Law. James implied the same thing but through a different perspective by saying that disobedience to this commandment meant that the person was transgressing the entire Law of Moses.

Three of the eight passages include the commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind. Neither this commandment nor the one to love our neighbor as ourself is in the Ten Commandments. However, both are part of the Law of Moses and are the foundation of the entire Law (Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Leviticus 19:17-18). That is, if a person truly kept these two commandments, then all the others would automatically be kept. This does not mean that God expects us to obey the Law of Moses in this dispensation of grace, however, as I explained in the previous chapter.

Who is Our Neighbor?

We are commanded to love our neighbor, but who is our neighbor? Are our neighbors people who live near us, people who are similar to us, people we like, other Christians, or everyone? Neighbors are mentioned throughout Scripture. One well-known passage about *the good Samaritan* even answers the question, "And who is my neighbor?"

> **And a lawyer** [*a teacher of the Law of Moses*] **stood up and put Him** [*Jesus*] **to the test, saying, "Teacher** [Master]**, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said to him, "What is written in the Law** [*of Moses*]**? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii** [*silver coins*] **and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" and he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."** (Luke 10:25-37)

There is much prophetic significance to this passage regarding Christ and Israel's future but let us limit ourselves (mostly, anyway) to the example at hand. The hypothetical man who was robbed and beaten apparently was a Jew from Jerusalem. Both the priest and the Levite, representing spiritual leaders of Judea and, therefore, fellow Jews of the man, both decided to pass him by without rendering assistance. The Jews were not to associate with Samaritans (I Kings 12:19; Matthew 10:5-6; John 4:7-26), and yet it was a Samaritan who went above and beyond to help the injured man. The account does not say whether the Samaritan knew that the injured man was a Jew. When Jesus asked the Jewish lawyer who among the three proved to be a neighbor to the injured man, he correctly responded that the Samaritan was the neighbor.

It might be helpful to understand the significance of including a Samaritan in this allegory, which does get into prophecy. The Samaritans were Jews by heritage but of the tribes that split from Judah (referred to as *Judea* in the New Testament) after King Solomon's reign. They were alienated from God by worshiping their own gods and worshiping in the city of Samaria instead of God's chosen city of Jerusalem (I Kings 11:9-13, 31-35; 12:16-20; 16:29-30). As part of God's prophetic plan, He will reunite Judea and Samaria (also often referred to as *Israel* in the Old Testament, thus we have the record of the kings of Judah and Israel in the

books I and II Kings) into the full nation of Israel sometime after the rapture (Ezekiel 37:15-23; Micah 2:12-13). That is why in Jesus' last commands to His disciples He instructed them to preach the gospel of the kingdom first to Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the rest of the world (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:6-8). The fulfillment of this command was prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24:14 and apparently will be fulfilled by the 144,000 witnesses during the time of great tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5). More information on this subject is provided in Appendix C.

An important lesson we can derive from this story is that a person's background does not determine whether he or she is our neighbor. Stated another way is that we are to help others in need regardless of their background. In this example, therefore, the same lesson applies if the roles were reversed (i.e., the Samaritan was beaten and a Jew rendered assistance). Although the Jews of Judea were not to associate with Samaritans, they were to treat them as neighbors.

Other verses and passages, including those that follow, describe who a neighbor is and support the above passage about the Samaritan.

> **"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native** [*born*] **among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God."** (Leviticus 19:33-34)

> **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I** [*Jesus*] **say to you, love your enemies and pray for those** [bless them] **who persecute you, so that you may be sons** [children] **of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles** [*heathen*] **do the same?"** (Matthew 5:43-47)

> **So then, while we** [*believers*] **have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith** [*fellow brethren*]**.** (Galatians 6:10)

> **We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted** [*timid*]**, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.** (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

From these passages we see that our neighbors are not only our fellow believers but everyone with whom we come in contact—even those who hate us or treat us unjustly. Furthermore, we are to be good to our neighbors, and our goodness is to be applied without discrimination. It makes no difference regarding race, color, gender (or sexual identification), nationality, creed, physical or mental challenges, financial status, level of education, political affiliation, etc.—our neighbor is our neighbor.

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario. My next-door neighbor is a generally mean person and never has a kind word to say to me or my family, and I do not and probably should not associate with him. One day he falls and hurts himself. What should I do as his neighbor? I hope I would do everything I can to help him, with no thought about how he has treated me and others and expecting nothing in return.

How Do We Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves?

We have seen that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and that everyone is our neighbor without distinction. How do we do this? I think that it is important to investigate what is meant by *love*, and then what it means to love our neighbors *as ourselves* and how we ought to do it.

Love

Brethren, we cannot love our neighbor as we are to love God (Mark 12:28-30). No one compares to the righteous and Almighty God (Romans 11:33-36; Psalm 139:1-6). We are not to worship our neighbor, and our neighbor has nothing to do with our salvation. Nor do I think we are to love our neighbor as we should love our parents, spouse, or children. The familiarity and intimacy associated with our loved ones are different and greater than we can bestow on others. However, I believe that our loved ones fall under the general category of *neighbor*. That is, what applies to our neighbor should also apply to our loved ones. So, how are we supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves?

God's Love for Us

Before we look at how to love our neighbors as ourselves, it is necessary to understand what love is and the source of love. Brethren, God is not only the author of love, He *is* love (I John 4:7-8). Please consider the following passages that reveal how God expressed His love toward us and continues to do so.

> **For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:6-8)
>
> **For I** [*Paul*] **am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8:38-39)
>
> **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions** [sins]**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** (Ephesians 2:4-7)
>
> **By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation** [*atoning sacrifice*] **for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** (I John 4:9-11)
>
> **We love, because He** [*God*] **first loved us.** (I John 4:19)

Think about it, brethren. As presented in Chapter 2, the Almighty God, creator of the universe, loved us unrighteous sinners so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. He sent His Son to pay the penalty that we deserve to pay. He sealed that payment by raising Christ from the dead, whose death was both physical and spiritual (Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:5-11). Christ was temporarily separated from His Father because the sin of the world was imputed to Him (Acts 2:29-31; II Corinthians 5:21). Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to pay for our sins is the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14).

If we believe it, then we are adopted by God as His own children and have the certain hope of eternal life (Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:3-8; Titus 3:4-7). Do you believe that Christ died for you?

Love Ourselves?

As noted earlier, the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. But is it correct to interpret the commandment in this way? What does it mean to love ourself? We must be careful to understand what Scripture says about this subject.

> **Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked** [*resentful*]**, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** (I Corinthians 13:4-7)
>
> **But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends.** (II Corinthians 10:17-18)
>
> **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** (Romans 12:16)
>
> **Let us not become boastful** [*conceited*]**, challenging one another, envying one another.** (Galatians 5:26)
>
> *(See also I Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:2-3)*

A danger of loving oneself is pride, and pride leads to so many other problems and sins. The book of Proverbs has much to say about pride (e.g., Proverbs 11:2; 16:18-19; 21:24; 29:23). The Jewish religious leaders in Jesus' day were hypocrites because of their pride (Matthew 23:1-33). Most of the problems among the Corinthian and Galatian brethren were rooted in pride (I Corinthians 3:1-4; 4:6-7; Galatians 3:1-3). Unfortunately, Paul warned that the display of man's nature will only get worse because the time leading up to the rapture will be characterized by men who are lovers of themselves, boastful, and arrogant among many other vices (II Timothy 3:1-5, 10-13; 4:3-4). These seem to be common traits today, or at least have become increasingly noticeable.

Is there a proper manner that we ought to love ourselves? I believe there is. For children of God (believers), our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16-17); additionally, we are in Christ and He is in us (Romans 8:1, 9-11; I Corinthians 1:30; 12:27; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 1:25-27). Therefore, I believe that God wants us to take care of our bodies both spiritually and physically. This is supported by Paul's instructions for a husband to love his wife as his own body, which he should naturally nourish and cherish.

> **Or do you** [*believer*] **not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.** (I Corinthians 6:19-20)
>
> **So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.** (Ephesians 5:28-30)

He who gets wisdom[1] **loves his own soul** [*life*]**; he who keeps understanding will find good.** (Proverbs 19:8)

We must be careful, however, because even this type of self-love can be motivated by, or lead to, pride. It is easy to focus our attention on our physical appearance as if we are in competition with our neighbors to be better than them (I Timothy 4:8). The same can hold true for spiritual nourishment if we want to be seen or recognized as more spiritual than our fellow brethren by openly praying more, studying more, or by being more active in our church or mission (Matthew 6:1-8). Our goal should be to grow in our salvation and be better servants for our Lord and not to show others how spiritual we are (Philippians 3:7-11; Ephesians 4:11-16).

There is another perspective regarding self-love that needs to be addressed here. I think there are many believers (perhaps all of us at times) who feel worthless—they do not feel loved and, correspondingly, have difficulty loving others. This overwhelming feeling can be caused by many factors but, perhaps, a major one is how inconsiderately, poorly, or judgmentally they are treated by others including family members and fellow believers. The first thought that comes to mind is to honestly evaluate how I am treating people.

Furthermore, I believe that we can help our suffering brethren by showing them what they, and *all* believers, have in Christ through salvation. Among other things, all believers are in Christ at the right hand of God, all are equal in Christ, and all have been blessed by God with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6, 18-23; 2:4-7; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). Every believer has been justified and made righteous by God through the work of Christ at the cross (Romans 5:6-11, 18-19; I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21). We have been made complete in Christ, and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Colossians 2:9-10; Romans 8:38-39). Reassured by these truths, I hope that they, too, can go forward and love their neighbors as themselves.

Love Others as Ourselves

We are to love ourselves not in a prideful way, but in a physically and spiritually nourishing way because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Unfortunately, we struggle at physically and spiritually nourishing ourselves. Therefore, loving others should not be dependent on how successful we are at loving ourselves. Thankfully, the Bible tells us both how and why we ought to love our neighbors.

"A new commandment I [*Jesus*] **give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** (John 13:34-35)

Let all that you do be done in love. (I Corinthians 16:14)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

Therefore I [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [*salvation*] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)

[1] We are to seek and conform to the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of this world (I Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-13; Ephesians 1:15-21; 3:8-10; Colossians 1:9-12; 3:16).

Therefore be imitators [followers] **of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.** (Ephesians 5:1-2)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ [God] **rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.** (Colossians 3:12-15)

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus [Christ] **our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus** [Christ] **with all His saints** [*children*, *believers*]**.** (I Thessalonians 3:11-13)

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [*atoning sacrifice*] **for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** (I John 4:9-11)

(See also John 15:12; II Corinthians 5:14-15; Ephesians 3:14-19; I Peter 4:8; I John 4:21)

Basically, therefore, we are to love others because God loves us and He wants us to love them. How do we go about doing this? Besides the example of the Samaritan, Scripture provides many real-life examples for us. The following representative verses and passages contain the word *neighbor* and instruct us about how to consider or treat our neighbors.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification [*to build him up*]**.** (Romans 15:1-2)

All things are lawful [*permissible*]**, but not all things are profitable** [*beneficial*]**. All things are lawful, but not all things edify** [*are constructive*]**. Let no one seek his own good** [*welfare*]**, but that of his neighbor.** (I Corinthians 10:23-24)

Therefore, laying aside falsehood [lying]**, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.** (Ephesians 4:25)

"You shall not bear [*give*] **false witness against your neighbor."** (Exodus 20:16)

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Exodus 20:17)

"You shall not oppress [defraud] **your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the Lord."** (Leviticus 19:13-14)

"You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer [*show favoritism*] **to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a**

slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:15-16)

O Lord, who may abide in Your tent [*tabernacle*, *sanctuary*]**? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.** (Psalm 15:1-3)

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it," when you have it with you. Do not devise harm against your neighbor, while he lives securely [*trustingly*] **beside you."** (Proverbs 3:27-29)

The righteous [*person*] **is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.** (Proverbs 12:26)

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor. (Proverbs 14:21)

These verses and passages provide the following instructions to us. Some other references that provide supporting exhortations on how to treat others, including those that do not contain the word *neighbor*, are enclosed in parenthesis for your consideration.

- We are to please our neighbor for his good, to his edification (I Corinthians 10:31-33).
- We are to speak truth with our neighbor (Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:14-16).
- We are to be a guide or good example to our neighbor (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8).
- We are not to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor (I Timothy 6:7-8; Philippians 4:11-13).
- We are not to bear false witness against our neighbor (Mark 14:53-59; Acts 6:8-14; 24:1-9; Proverbs 24:28-29).
- We are not to judge our neighbor unfairly by showing partiality or favoritism (I Timothy 5:19-21; James 2:1-4; Deuteronomy 10:17-19).
- We are not to defraud or rob our neighbor (I Corinthians 6:7-8; Ephesians 4:28).
- We are not to slander or do any evil toward our neighbor (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Leviticus 19:33-34).
- We are not to despise our neighbor because God considers that to be sin (Proverbs 11:12).

Of course, there are many other passages in the Bible that do not mention the word *neighbor* but that provide instructions on how we are to treat or respond to other people. For example, please read the following verses to see some more things that God expects of us. Each passage contains more than one attitude or action to love our neighbor or, conversely, demonstrates our lack of love (or the opposite of love). I will focus on aspects of these passages throughout the book.

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints [*fellow brethren*]**, practicing hospitality.** (Romans 12:9-13)

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [*nonbelievers*]**, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.** (Colossians 4:5-6)

We urge you, brethren, admonish [warn] **the unruly, encourage the fainthearted** [*timid*]**, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.** (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

(See also II Corinthians 13:11; Colossians 3:14-17; Romans 14:4; James 4:12)

Evil for Evil?

Perhaps the most difficult exhortation associated with loving our neighbors as ourselves is to not respond in like manner toward those who hate or persecute us. Payback (revenge) for actual or perceived words or actions against us is part of our nature as amply demonstrated by mankind since the beginning. As believers, however, not only are we commanded by God not to respond to evil with evil, but we are also commanded to love our enemies, help them in time of need, and, *if possible*, be at peace with them. Further still, we are to bless those who persecute us. Please carefully consider the following passages.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (I Thessalonians 5:15)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I [*Jesus*] **say to you, love your enemies and pray for those** [bless them] **who persecute you, so that you may be sons** [children] **of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles** [*heathen*] **do the same?"** (Matthew 5:43-47)

Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render [*pay back*] **to the man according to his work."** (Proverbs 24:28-29)

To this present hour we [*Paul and his coworkers*] **are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate** [*answer kindly*]**; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.** (I Corinthians 4:11-13)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

(See also Psalm 15:1-3; Luke 6:27-36)

Brethren, it is not always possible, or perhaps it is rarely possible, to be at peace with (or reconcile with) those who hate or work against us. We may have the desire to do so, but often those working against us do not have a similar desire; the barrier appears to be too great to overcome. However, we are to treat them as our neighbor anyway and leave vengeance, or whatever outcome, to God. We never know when God may work through both sides and provide the peace that we thought was impossible.

Do Unto Others

What does it mean, then, to love our neighbor as ourself? We have looked at love, from the love of God to the exhortations to love others because of His love for us. From the scriptural perspective, loving ourself appears to be limited to spiritually and physically nurturing our own body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and because we are members of the body of Christ—the church that Christ cherishes.

We have also examined who our neighbors are and how we should treat them. It turns out that our neighbors are everyone with whom we come in contact, even those who treat us as enemies. There is no lack of exhortations on how we should demonstrate our love for our neighbors as well as how not to treat them. In Romans 13:8-10 we see that love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Upon considering all the passages that are presented here, and more that I did not type out or reference, I believe that the exhortation does not mean that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Instead, I believe that to love our neighbors as ourselves means to treat them how we want to be treated. This is by no means an original thought because the Bible says that we ought to treat people as we want them to treat us. This is the so-called *Golden Rule* about which multitudes of people—believers and nonbelievers alike—are familiar. The source of the *Golden Rule* is our Bible, as demonstrated through the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is [*sums up*] **the Law and the Prophets."** (Matthew 7:12)

"But I [*Jesus*] **say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners**[2] **love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and**

[2] Everyone sins, but *sinners* in this context refers to these who are not of God or are opposed to Him; i.e., nonbelievers.

your reward will be great, and you will be sons [children] **of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."** (Luke 6:27-36)

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said that treating others the way we want to be treated sums up the Law and the Prophets. Because He also said that loving our neighbor as ourself also sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:34-40), I believe that these two commands are one and the same. Think of all of instructions on how God expects us to treat others, through both our thoughts and our actions. It seems obvious that we would want to be thought of and treated the same way. Additionally, He tells us how not to treat others. No one would want other people to treat us in that manner.

When recalling my own experiences, several things come to mind regarding treating others in the way I want to be treated. Please consider the following examples and think of your experiences and expectations. Among many other things, I appreciate it when:

- Someone is thinking of me, praying for me, or tries to help me in my time of need.
- I am treated fairly.
- People are kind and courteous to me.
- I receive a smile.
- People do not lie or make excuses to me.
- Something I have done or said is accurately represented by others and not used to slander me.
- I receive a sincere "Thank you" when I have done something for someone.
- My apology is sincerely accepted.

How Do We Do It?

We have seen how God wants us to think about and treat our neighbors and why we should do so. Scripture furnishes many responses that are not what we might normally do or even consider doing. Are we really supposed to treat others with goodness and love despite our differences? Are we really to respond to evil directed against us with goodness? Yes, but how do we do what God expects us to do?

I believe that the only way that we can love our neighbors as ourselves is by truly embracing the love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ for us. We must recognize that we cannot do what God wants us to do through our own natural ability. Our natural self is sinful and contrary to God (Romans 3:9-18; 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:14). Upon believing the gospel of salvation, however, God imputed the nature of Christ to us when He adopted us as His children—we are in Christ and He is in us. The only true goodness that can come out of us is by the working of God through us (Ephesians 2:10).

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;[3] **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

Furthermore, God works through us by using our individual personalities and personal skills—everyone is different. Timothy and Titus, coworkers of Paul, come to mind. Through Paul's letters to Timothy, we get the sense that Timothy was unassertive and perhaps physically frail (I Timothy 4:12; 5:23; 6:20-21). On the other hand, Paul's instructions to Titus indicate that he was a more confident and outgoing person who could convince people to do the right thing (Titus 1:5-6; 2:11-15; II Corinthians 7:13-15). Both men were different

[3] Paul was not saying that we are to earn our salvation, which we cannot do, but to humbly walk worthy of the salvation that God has graciously given us.

but were used mightily by God. Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband who one would assume would have different perspectives and would work with people in different ways, also were used by God in their service to Paul and by helping others understand the word of God (Acts 18:1-3, 24-26; Romans 16:3-5). We should not try to be someone we are not, which gives a false impression. Sooner or later others will see through our facade, and we will lose their trust.

We are ambassadors for Christ; that is, we are His representatives on this earth (II Corinthians 5:20). Just as with our political ambassadors, however, we can either be good ambassadors or poor ambassadors. God has provided us with the capability and tools through His Holy Spirit and Christ to do what He expects of us (II Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:12-13). We need to humbly submit ourselves to God and desire to do the right thing (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 13:5-8; I Peter 3:13-17). This requires a conscious effort (self-discipline) to suppress our sin nature and focus on God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:8-14; I Timothy 4:6-8; Colossians 3:1-17). Brethren, obedience to God and His word does not come naturally, so there is no room for boasting when we actually do obey God except in God Himself (I Corinthians 1:26-31; II Corinthians 10:17-18).

We are not to live for ourselves but for God and our Lord Jesus Christ because of what Christ did for us at the cross (Galatians 2:20). If we are living for God, then we are more apt to obey the many facets of the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. May the light of Christ shine through us as we deal with our neighbors (Philippians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:9-14; Ephesians 5:8-14).

> **For the love of Christ controls** [*compels*] **us** [*believers*]**, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.** (II Corinthians 5:14-15)
>
> **Therefore if** [*because*] **you** [*brethren*] **have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.** (Colossians 3:1-4)
>
> **The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly** [walk honestly] **as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** (Romans 13:12-14)
>
> **So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ** [God] **rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Colossians 3:12-17)

Stand Firm in Our Faith

The Bible has much to say about loving our neighbors as ourselves, even if our neighbors mistreat or do evil to us. How can we reconcile these commandments and exhortations with our instructions to stand firm

in our faith (and in *the* faith—Ephesians 4:11-13; Colossians 1:21-23), which the Bible also says that we should do? Please consider the following passages that are just as true as the ones we have already looked at.

> **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast** [*firm*]**, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.** (I Corinthians 15:58)

> **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery** [*i.e., the Law of Moses*]**.** (Galatians 5:1)

> **Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I** [*Paul*] **come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.** (Philippians 1:27-28)

> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one** [*Satan*]**. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** (Ephesians 6:10-17)

> *(See also I Corinthians 16:13-14; Philippians 4:1; I Thessalonians 3:6-8)*

From these passages we see how we are exhorted to stand firm in our faith. Please note that the armor of God that we are to put on is for the purpose of protection. Our true enemy is Satan and his spiritual forces of wickedness; therefore, those who persecute us are tools of Satan and are not our real enemies. How can we stand firm while at the same time love our neighbors as ourselves? Standing firm in the faith involves depending on God for our strength (using His armor), not denying the truth of God, and using opportunities to share the word of God.

> **But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form** [appearance] **of evil.** (I Thessalonians 5:21-22)

> **Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.** (Philippians 2:14-16)

> **Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders** [*nonbelievers*]**, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.** (Colossians 4:5-6)

But the Bible, through Paul's exhortation to Timothy and his own contemplation when he faced his imminent execution, speaks of fighting the good fight of faith (II Timothy 4:1-8). Is this contradictory to the passages above? No. We usually think of fighting as an aggressive action, but the context of fighting the good fight of faith is standing firm (unwavering) in the faith through love and gentleness. We are not to attack those who oppose the word of God or our stand on it to intimidate or force them to believe the truth (or judge them

if they do not do so). Instead, we are to make known His word through our stand for, or defense of, the gospel in a gracious manner (Philippians 1:3-7). Brethren, we cannot make anyone believe God or His word. We must always remember that only God, through His Spirit, opens our eyes to understanding His truth (Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-12; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:44-45).

> **But flee from these things,**[4] **you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** (I Timothy 6:11-12)

> **The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.** (II Timothy 2:24-26)

> **Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.** (I Peter 3:13-16)

Loving our neighbors as ourselves does not require us to be like our neighbors or do as they do. We are not to conform to the ways of this sinful world; instead, we are to flee from sin (the deeds of the flesh) by behaving properly according to the Spirit of God (Romans 13:12-14; Galatians 5:16-25; Colossians 3:1-17). Brethren, we need to seriously evaluate what we do with our friends and acquaintances. Do our actions or associations bring honor or dishonor to God? Are we being good ambassadors for Christ?

> **Therefore I** [*Paul*] **urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual** [reasonable] **service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** (Romans 12:1-2)

> **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons** [children] **of disobedience** [*nonbelievers*]**. Therefore do not be partakers with them;**[5] **for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn** [proving] **what is pleasing to the Lord.** (Ephesians 5:6-10)

If we live for Christ we will also suffer for Christ because this sinful world, which includes our neighbors, will react to the truth of God by working against us (Philippians 1:27-30). The question is in what manner or attitude should we respond to those who disparage our Lord or our faith or try to get us to join in their sinful ways? We are to do so with love and grace, and we must always remember never to pay back evil for evil.

> **Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** (II Timothy 3:12)

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[4] Paul was telling Timothy that we must flee from the love of money, which leads to all sorts of evil (I Timothy 6:6-10).

[5] Paul was exhorting the Ephesian believers to not live according to sinfulness as the nonbelievers live (and as they themselves once lived—Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-24), but to live as representatives of Christ and the truth of God—the light of God—so that perhaps some may *see* their need for salvation (Ephesians 5:11-14).

Unfortunately, our opposition may not come so much from nonbelievers as from fellow brethren and nonbelievers who profess to be saved[6] (Galatians 5:13-15; Ephesians 4:25-32). For example, they may verbally attack or slander us for our understanding of (and our stand for) the word of God or for not conforming with them in activities that are contrary to the will of God. Consequently, standing firm in our faith may require us to correct fellow brethren or even separate ourselves from them (Romans 16:17-18; II Thessalonians 3:6; II Timothy 2:20-26). This is exceedingly difficult to do, but it is for our own good as well as for our fellow believers (I Corinthians 5:1-13). However, we need to do so in the same way we would want to be treated. That is, without hate and in a humble manner that edifies instead of tears apart (Ephesians 4:29-32).

> **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching** [doctrine]**, for reproof, for correction, for training** [instruction] **in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

> **We urge you, brethren, admonish** [warn] **the unruly, encourage the fainthearted** [*timid*]**, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** (I Thessalonians 5:14)

> **If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame** [*feel* ashamed]**. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.** (II Thessalonians 3:14-15)

Brethren, standing firm in our faith is not an easy task, nor is doing so while loving our neighbors as ourselves. We need to scrutinize ourselves to make sure that we are not reacting to people in ways that serve our own purposes or satisfy our own ego. Standing firm is not a competition and should not be conducted at the expense of others. In all things we do involving others, we must remember and endeavor to love them as ourselves (I Corinthians 16:13-14).

Humble Reality

If we diligently try to love our neighbors as ourselves, will we reach a point where one could say, "I love my neighbor as myself"? If we think that we can or have already done so, we will become prideful in our perceived perfection. Brethren, because of our sin nature we will never reach that point—we will never be able to always obey all the requirements by God associated with loving our neighbors. However, if we honestly assess ourselves (II Corinthians 13:4-5), we will be more aware of our shortcomings. When we see them, we ought to be thankful that God loves us and has already forgiven us (Romans 3:23-26; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Colossians 2:13), and endeavor to correct our behavior while depending on the grace and strength of God.

Our goal should be to love our neighbors as ourselves and to walk worthy of our salvation. God has revealed what He expects of us. However, we should not even try to keep track of our successes, for this, too, leads to pride. God's desire is that we set our minds on our glorified Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-4). That way, we will be more likely to set aside the desires of the flesh and live according to the fruit of the Spirit (Colossians 3:5-17; Galatians 5:16-25).

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[6] *Professing believers*, or *false brethren*, are those who falsely claim to believe the truth of God or even the gospel of salvation (they call themselves Christians), sometimes for some form of personal gain (Acts 8:9-24; II Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4; I Timothy 6:3-5). Paul referred to them as believing in vain (I Corinthians 15:1-2). Although there are exceptions (see Titus 1:15-16), it often may be difficult or even impossible for true believers to know if a person is a false believer—only God knows a person's heart.

Therefore, Walk in Love

So, what does the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves mean? First, it is directed to all believers, and we are to consider everyone with whom we come into contact as our neighbor, even those who hate or do evil to us. Furthermore, the Bible does not say that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, for the manner in which we love (or not love) ourselves may have a detrimental effect on how we love others.

What is the scriptural context of this commandment? It is a commandment that first appears in the Law of Moses and all the subsequent exhortations to love our neighbors as ourselves are provided in reference to the Law. In the New Testament we are informed that keeping the commandment fulfills the Law. When we look at all the Scripture references regarding who our neighbors are and how we should treat them, it appears that the commandment can be restated or described by the exhortation to do unto them as we would want them to do unto us—the so-called *Golden Rule*. I believe that Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 22:34-40, where Jesus said treating others as we want to be treated and loving our neighbors as ourselves *both* sum up the Law and the Prophets, support this perspective.

Although we are not under the Law of Moses in this dispensation of the grace of God, the righteousness of the Law still holds true, and we are to genuinely love those we come in contact with—our neighbors. This love is not generated within us by our own effort but is the love of God. To obey this commandment, we need to embrace the love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ for us, using the word of God and the personal tools that He has granted to us as individuals. If we do so, then we are also obeying the instruction to walk worthy of our salvation.

To love our neighbors as ourselves does not mean that we are to join in the sinfulness of this world. We are ambassadors for Christ and are lights in this dark world; therefore, we must flee from sin and its temptations. However, we must also stand firm in the faith and, when necessary, admonish our fellow brethren who are caught up in sin and even separate ourselves from them to avoid falling into sin with them. Doing so must be without hate or judgment; we are to deal with everyone, including our fellow brethren, with love and humility.

Each of us needs to carefully consider how we treat our neighbors. How do we talk about or treat those who we do not agree with? Are we prepared to help a stranger in time of need, or do we tend to judge some people as unworthy of our help? Would people, whether relatives, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, or strangers, consider us to be good neighbors? May we endeavor to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we do so, we are walking in love.

Chapter 6

Walk with Humility

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:6-7)

Let Us Be Humble

In the previous chapter we saw that love is the cornerstone of our walk for our Lord. A common thread in the Scripture verses and passages about love is humility. That is, love and humility go hand in hand. We cannot truly love others if we put our needs and desires first or if we think we are better than them. I will reuse many of the verses and passages focused on love that appeared in the previous chapter, but now please consider them in the context of humility.

The Bible has much to say about humility and its counterpart, pride. We are exhorted to be humble and are warned against being proud. Why is this? Humility is not part of our sin nature, whereas pride is. Our natural tendency is to be prideful and not humble. Like love, however, the fact that both believers and nonbelievers can demonstrate genuine humility in their thoughts and actions is by the grace of God. Try to imagine our world without love and humility.

What is the definition of humility? Based on standard dictionary definitions, attributes of humility include being aware of one's own shortcomings, modest or unpretentious, and meek; showing deferential respect or consideration of others and being submissive; and lacking high station. These attributes contrast with pride, which is defined as having an excessively high opinion of oneself, and being conceited, arrogant, and boastful.

Unlike people who are not saved, believers *should* have a greater desire to live humble lives because we *should* recognize why we ought to be humble. We have the means to be humble because we are in Christ and the Holy Spirit is working within us (Romans 8:9-13; Galatians 5:16-25). Being undeserving sinners who are saved by the grace of God should cause us to humble ourselves before God. We will explore this more fully later. For now, let us see what Scripture says about humility and pride. Although referenced throughout the Bible, in the interest of time and space we will focus (with a few exceptions) on what is said in the New Testament.

Brethren, we need to scrutinize ourselves, perhaps by putting ourselves in the shoes of those who know us best. How do people, including our spouse, members of our family, friends, coworkers, etc., see us? Do they understand us as being humble or arrogant? Can they count on us to be considerate of their needs or desires, or do they know that we put ourselves first? Likewise, how do our words or actions come across to acquaintances and strangers who we encounter in our day-to-day lives? Finally, how do we think God, who knows all things including the motives of our heart, sees us? Please consider these things while reading the following Scripture verses and passages.

Characteristics of Humility

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble [meek] **in justice, and He teaches the humble His way.** (Psalm 25:8-9)

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble [lowly] **is wisdom.** (Proverbs 11:2)

Humility is expressed in many forms. Although all are related and overlap to some degree, some of the characteristics of humility described in Scripture include being gentle, modest, content, considerate, submissive, forgiving, and thankful. The only person in Scripture who demonstrated all forms of humility is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-8; I Peter 2:21-24). We need to remind ourselves of His humility and the exhortations to be humble throughout Scripture, and endeavor to conduct our lives with humility. Let us see what Scripture says about humility and being humble.

Being Meek (Gentle)

The words *meek* and *meekness* when describing another person often tend to be used in condescending or belittling ways. We might think of a meek person as being a pushover or as one who has little or no self-assurance—someone who is weak. This is not how God describes meekness, however. Moses was not a pushover even though God considered him to be humble (Numbers 12:3), and Jesus spoke with authority (Matthew 7:28-29; 23:1-36). To turn the other cheek or to be patient when wronged requires an inner strength that comes from God (Luke 6:27-30; I Corinthians 6:7-8). The Greek words for *meek* and associated words are used to describe gentleness, moderation, and consideration for others, which represent humility.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit [*not spiritually arrogant*]**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle** [meek]**, for they shall inherit the earth."** (Matthew 5:3-5)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness [meekness]**; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.** (Galatians 6:1)

Let your gentle spirit [moderation] **be known to all men. The Lord is near.** (Philippians 4:5)

But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness [meekness]**.** (I Timothy 6:11)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness [meekness] **correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.** (II Timothy 2:24-25)

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable [*uncontentious*]**, gentle, showing every consideration** [all meekness] **for all men.** (Titus 3:1-2)

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness [meekness] **and reverence.** (I Peter 3:14-15)

Being Modest or Unpretentious

Modesty is another attribute that tends to have a bad reputation. That is because it is natural for us to want to draw attention to ourselves through various means. Think of all the ways that we do this. For example, do we show off our financial success or luxurious taste through the kinds of clothes we wear, the vehicles we drive, or the homes we own? Do we want people to praise us for our skills whether they be in our trade or

profession, athletics, academics, or the arts? Do we want others to be attracted to ourselves through our charisma?

It is not a sin to be financially successful, accomplished in our endeavors, or admired by others. However, how we accomplish these things (and the motives for doing so) and how we use them can be sinful (I Timothy 6:7-10, 17-19). On the other hand, we can fall into the trap of being proud of our modesty; we may want to be noticed and praised for our modest means and behavior. Is this any better?

Scripture addresses modesty through our motives. We are instructed not to do things for the purpose of being noticed by others. Instead, we are to do the right things for the right reasons and because it is the right thing to do (Romans 12:17; Colossians 3:17, 23; I Peter 2:15, 20; 3:17; 4:19). If we do all things for the Lord rather than to gain the attention of others, then those around us will benefit in one way or another.

> **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."** (Matthew 6:1-4)

> **"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."** (Matthew 6:5-6)

> **Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly** [walk honestly] **toward outsiders** [*nonbelievers*] **and not be in any need.** (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

> **Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle** [meek] **and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.** (I Peter 3:3-4)

> **Whatever you do, do your work heartily** [*from the soul*]**, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.** (Colossians 3:23-24)

Being Content

It seems to be a struggle for many (most?) of us to be content. It is so easy to want or crave something different or more than we have. But this is not God's way. He has promised to provide for our needs, but we may not even realize He is doing so if we forget to be thankful to God for what we have.

> **And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:19)

We may feel or say that God is not meeting our needs because of various circumstances. In the above verse Paul was writing to the Philippian brethren who were living their faith and being used by God to meet the physical needs of Paul while he was in prison (Philippians 4:10-18). They were relying on God and would have been more apt to see how God was working in their lives and meeting their needs. If we look to God instead of ourselves, I believe we will realize that God is, indeed, providing for all our needs. Furthermore, we may discover that our definition of *needs* is different than what God considers our needs to be.

By wanting or striving to get more than we have indicates that our focus is on ourselves, which is the opposite of humility. God wants us to be content. He wants us to acknowledge that He is in control and working all things together for our good (Romans 8:26-28; Philippians 2:12-13). God wants us to realize that He is able to do far more than we could ask or think. He also wants us to go to Him in prayer with all our concerns, with thanksgiving. If we do, then we can know the peace of God, which is a natural consequence of being content.

> **And He** [*the Lord*] **has said to me** [*Paul*]**, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.** (II Corinthians 12:9-10)
>
> **Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.** (Philippians 4:11)
>
> **But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.** (I Timothy 6:6-9)
>
> **Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself** [*the Lord*] **has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5)
>
> **Now to Him** [*God*] **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.** (Ephesians 3:20)
>
> **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:6-7)

Showing Deferential Respect or Consideration for Others

God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). That is, no one is more deserving of His grace than another because God sees all of us as dead in sin prior to salvation, and by His grace sees all of His children as equally alive and blessed in Christ once saved (Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:1-7). No one *earns* the favor of God. If God does not consider our differences—that no one is more worthy of salvation than another (Romans 3:21-23; 10:12; Galatians 3:26-28)—then we should not consider others as more or less worthy of our respect or consideration.

God wants us to love and be at peace (if possible—Romans 12:18) with our fellow brethren and be devoted to them. Furthermore, instead of being offensive or self-centered, He wants us to consider others as *more important* than ourselves and put their interests before our own. This same consideration applies to nonbelievers with whom we associate, for we are to live as Christ's representatives (II Corinthians 5:20). We ought to humbly serve one another, seeking each other's good and uplifting each other as opportunities arise.

"Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty [*seasoned*] **again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."** (Mark 9:50)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor. (Romans 12:10)

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. (Romans 15:1-2)

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable [expedient]**. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.** (I Corinthians 10:23-24)

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks [Gentiles] **or to the church of God** [*fellow brethren—the body of Christ*]**.** (I Corinthians 10:32)

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith [*fellow brethren*]**.** (Galatians 6:10)

Therefore I [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [*salvation*] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Colossians 3:12-13)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [*nonbelievers*]**, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.** (Colossians 4:5-6)

Remind them [*the brethren*] **to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration** [all meekness] **for all men.** (Titus 3:1-2)

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic [*compassionate*]**, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit** [courteous]**.** (I Peter 3:8)

Being Submissive

Being submissive to others is another concept that many of us seem to struggle with, and yet we do it all the time. As children we should have been submissive to our parents by being obedient to them (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20). As students, we were submissive (or at least we should have been) to our teachers by behaving in class and completing our assignments. As employees, we are submissive to our employers and supervisors by doing our work as instructed or expected. As citizens, we are submissive to our government by obeying its laws and paying our taxes.

Perhaps the struggle is because we often resent having to be submissive. We behave submissively because we feel that we have to instead of desiring to do so. We forget that we should do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. How often did we disobey our parents simply because we did not want to do what we were told to do? How often do we bend or break our employer's rules to our advantage or simply because we are tired of so many rules? How often do we intentionally exceed speed limits because we think they are an infringement on our personal rights or that it is OK unless we are caught? Unfortunately, many people, including the children of God, prove by their actions that they are not submissive.

Being submissive is recognizing that someone or something is more important than ourselves. It is another way of showing respect or consideration for others, not only for those who are in authority over us but to those with whom we associate every day. Brethren, we ought to be submissive to God because He is the Almighty God who saved us by His grace. We ought to submit ourselves to others because Christ provided the greatest example of humility by submitting to God for our sakes by dying on the cross for us.

And Mary said, "Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

For the love of Christ controls [*constrains*] **us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.** (II Corinthians 5:14-15)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [*asserted, retained*]**, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** (Philippians 2:5-8)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:6-7)

There are verses that say that a wife is to be submissive (in subjection) to her husband (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1). This is a difficult or even an unacceptable command to many wives (and women in general) and I can understand why this is the case. We must remember, though, that God established the husband's authority over his wife (Ephesians 5:22-24). However, too many husbands abuse this authority and

show little or no respect for their wives (I Peter 3:7). Their arrogance may be expressed through emotional or physical abuse, which are exceedingly sinful and inexcusable. They forget that they are instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church—so much so that He died for us (Ephesians 5:25-30). They also forget, through their own pride, that they are no more important spiritually than their wives (Galatians 3:28), and that they are to consider the interests of others first (Philippians 2:3-4). If a husband truly loves his wife, then her subjection to him should not even be an issue. Nevertheless, a believing wife should subject herself to her husband in the same sense that *all* of us should subject ourselves to one another and to our Lord.

However, I confess my uncertainty or lack of scriptural understanding as to whether there are limits regarding submissiveness. Personally, I do not believe that God requires a wife to subject herself and/or her children to abuse by her husband, who has failed in his responsibility to God and to his wife and family (Ephesians 5:28-30; 6:4; Colossians 3:21). I believe that this, along with infidelity (Matthew 19:9), is a legitimate reason for separation or divorce.[1] These are my thoughts for your consideration.

> **In the same way, you wives, be submissive** [in subjection] **to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.** (I Peter 3:1-2)

> **And be subject** [*Submit*] **to one another in the fear of** [*out of respect to*] **Christ** [God]**.** (Ephesians 5:21)

> **Servants, be submissive** [subject] **to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.**[2] **For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.** (I Peter 2:18-19)

> **You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.** (I Peter 5:5)

Furthermore, we ought to submit to our governing authorities because they are established by the will of God. How often, and in how many ways, do we demonstrate that we do not submit to our government and its laws? I will address this subject in Chapter 10.

> **Remind them** [*fellow brethren*] **to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration** [all meekness] **for all men.** (Titus 3:1-2)

Our attitude and behavior are noticed by others and affect them, and we may never know when God is using us to change another person's life. Let us humbly be submissive, from the heart, as we ought to be.

Forgiving Others

Forgiveness is another expression of humility. We should be humbled by the fact that Christ died for our sins. He who knew no sin became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). Christ gave up His position at the right hand of God to come to earth as a man and humbled Himself to God the Father by obediently dying on the cross for us. Brethren, every one of us was an enemy of God and not one of us deserves His saving grace. Not only

[1] See also I Corinthians 7:10-16 for more instructions to believers about separation and divorce.

[2] I believe it is correct to say that this passage also applies to the employee/employer relationship (see also Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22 – 4:1).

were we forgiven of our sins when we believed the gospel of salvation, but God's forgiveness covers all sins that we subsequently commit. Again, this forgiveness is something we do not deserve.

Additionally, we should humbly remember what God did for us through Christ when others sin against us by saying or doing things that hurt us in one way or another, whether they do them intentionally or not. Admittedly, this is not easy. But then, dying on the cross was not easy. The greatest example of forgiveness that we have was when our Lord asked God to forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). Stephen, also, asked that God would not hold the sin of those who were stoning him to death against them (Acts 7:58-60).

True forgiveness comes from the heart and does not need to be verbalized. Will the one who hurt us be changed through our forgiveness, or even acknowledge that their words or actions hurt us? That is entirely up to God and is not a condition of our forgiveness. Although God reconciled us to Himself through the death of Christ (Romans 5:10-11), there is no promise for us that forgiveness will reconcile us to each other. May we endeavor to humbly and sincerely forgive others as God has instructed us to do.

> **In Him** [*Christ*] **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses** [sins]**, according to the riches of His** [*God's*] **grace.** (Ephesians 1:7)
>
> **Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:32)
>
> **So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.** (Colossians 3:12-13)

As demonstrated above, we are to forgive those who sin against us because God has forgiven our sins. How far does this go? How often should we forgive someone who hurts us through words or deeds? Peter asked our Lord this very question as recorded in Matthew 18:21-22 and Luke 17:3-4. When we consider these passages together, we find that if someone (a "brother") sins against us and asks for forgiveness (repents), then we are not only to forgive him seven times, but seventy times seven times. I am not sure if there is anything special about these numbers—they seem to mean that if a person asks for forgiveness, then we should forgive. This would be in accordance with forgiving others because we are forgiven. Furthermore, we can and should be forgiving even if someone does not ask for forgiveness, as our Lord did at the cross and as Stephen did while being stoned to death.

Forgiveness to this extent is admittedly very difficult to do, but God has already forgiven us no matter how often we sin against Him. Remember that at the very moment we believe that Christ died for our sins, God not only forgives our past sins but has forgiven us for our sins committed from that moment on because He sees (knows) us in Christ (Romans 3:21-26; 7:18 – 8:2; Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:4-7; Hebrews 10:11-12). Consequently, we never see in Paul's letters a command or exhortation to confess our sins for God's forgiveness, either for salvation or for our daily walk. That is because we are completely forgiven when we believe the gospel of salvation.

I think some clarification is needed for the previous statement about confession of sins because many of us, like me, were raised believing that we need to confess our sins to obtain forgiveness. Confessing sins was associated with repentance and water baptism for the remissions of sins (Matthew 3:1-2, 5-6; 4:17; Mark 1:4-5; Acts 2:37-38). This was an essential part of the gospel of the kingdom proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His twelve disciples to the people of Israel as shown in Chapter 4. They were not confessing specific

sins, but were admitting the fact that they were sinful and disobedient to God. The well-known verse I John 1:9 is usually, but mistakenly, applied to daily confession of our sins so that God will forgive us. Brethren, we are already forgiven. This verse is referring to the same type of confession as before—for salvation—for the people of Israel and will be applicable to them after the rapture (see I John 3:4-9; Ezekiel 36:22-27). As believers in this dispensation of grace we are, however, to acknowledge our sinfulness and have a repentant heart (a desire to change) because this leads to closer fellowship with God and a realization of His peace (II Corinthians 7:8-10).

Regarding forgiveness, we need to address difficult realities in life. Do we just continue to take abuse from someone? There is a hard lesson in Scripture about separating ourselves from those who overtly sin. As an example, because of problems within the Corinthian church, Paul referred back to the Old Testament about God's command to His people (Israel) to not associate with the nonbelieving nations (II Corinthians 6:14-18). In applying this precept to believers today, he explained the need to separate ourselves from unruly brethren and those who were teaching false doctrine (I Corinthians 5:9-13; Romans 16:17-19; II Thessalonians 3:6-11, 14-15; Titus 3:9-11). Why is this?

Brethren, bad company corrupts good morals (I Corinthians 15:33-34). The Corinthian church was being negatively impacted by continuing fellowship with an outwardly immoral fellow believer (I Corinthians 5:1-2). Additionally, continually taking abuse can lead to mental, physical, and spiritual turmoil within ourselves and can tempt us to sin in response. Although reconciliation is desirable and should be pursued, there is no guarantee that it will work out (Romans 12:18). We need to prayerfully consider if or when we should separate ourselves from an abusive person or situation.

Finally, are we to forgive and forget? The way our brains are wired, it is difficult to forget hurtful things that are done or said to us (or things we have done to others). If we do not forget, does that mean that we have not really forgiven that person? Not necessarily. It is about *how* we remember it. Are we still holding it against them? If so, then we likely did not really forgive them. On the other hand, are we remembering it for a better purpose, such as for realizing the grace and graciousness of God through true forgiveness from the heart, or using the experience as an example of growth or spiritual maturity in our lives? Let us endeavor to be truly forgiving. Also, as we remember that we are forgiven by God, we should also forgive ourselves for past sins and not dwell on them; otherwise, we are denying the grace of God and being self-centered instead of humble (Romans 7:21 – 8:4).

Being Thankful

Giving thanks is an acknowledgment of a favor, gift, or benefit—it is an expression of gratitude. It can be for something tangible that we receive, or simply a humble response to the love or support someone else gives us. If we are truly thankful, we are acknowledging that we are dependent on someone in some way or another. On the other hand, being ungrateful is proving that we think we are self-sufficient. Consider, also, the good feeling we experience when we are thanked in some way for something we did for someone else.

Brethren, we have so much to be thankful for, beginning with our salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In truth, when we believe from our heart that Christ died for our sins, we are thanking God for His indescribable gift to us (II Corinthians 9:15; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9). We ought to be thankful for all that God has provided for us, acknowledging that He is working everything out for our good (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 1:6). We ought, also, to be thankful to and for family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers who help us in so many ways. Finally, we ought to be thankful for our fellow brethren and how God is working through them.

Although it feels good when we are thanked, we should not expect to be thanked for doing what we are expected to do; if we are working for someone, we are paid to do our job (Romans 4:4). Nor should we voluntarily do things for others with the expectation of being thanked or receiving recognition. Instead, we are to do all things for the Lord, giving thanks through Him to God our Father (Colossians 3:23). As believers who have received everything by the grace of God, we should be thankful to those who help us or work for us. Thankfulness from the heart is the outward expression of inward humility.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation [for your fellowship] **in the gospel from the first day until now.** (Philippians 1:3-5)

Greet Prisca [Priscilla] **and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.** (Romans 16:3-4)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:18)

Characteristics of Pride

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling [a fall]**. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.** (Proverbs 16:18-19)

A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor. (Proverbs 29:23)

Perhaps to understand humility better, it is worthwhile to examine pride, which is the opposite of humility. Unfortunately, it is often easier to be proud than humble. Scripture has much to say about pride, and mostly not in a good way.

Moses was used mightily by God, yet God considered him to be the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). However, through one act of pride, by striking the rock to bring forth water instead of speaking to it as God commanded, Moses was prevented from entering the promised land (Numbers 20:8-12). Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was exceedingly proud of his accomplishments; the Almighty God, however, humbled him and apparently saved him by His grace (Daniel 4:28-37).

There are several characteristics of pride presented in Scripture. As with humility, they are all related and overlap to some degree. Ways in which we express pride include boasting in ourselves, being arrogant toward others, thinking too highly of ourselves, judging others, and seeking retribution. Also, feeling sorry for ourselves if we suffer persecution for the sake of Christ is a type of pride that will be addressed in Chapter 12. We need to evaluate ourselves, brethren. Are we thinking or acting according to humility, or according to pride?

Being Proud

Brethren, Scripture expressly tells us *not* to be proud of who we are or what we do. God does not want us to desire to be mighty or seek the praise of man. We are not to consider ourselves as better than others because, by doing so, we are proving that we are self-centered and forgetting that all we have is by the grace of God.

"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matthew 23:12)

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:21-23)

"But it is not this way among you [*twelve disciples*]**, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave** [servant] **of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** (Mark 10:43-45)

"And His [*God's*] **mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble."** (Luke 1:50-52)

And He [*Jesus*] **began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."** (Luke 14:7-11)

For you were called to freedom [liberty]**, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.** (Galatians 5:13)

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Being Boastful

How often, and in how many ways, do we boast about ourselves? It is our nature to take credit for our accomplishments and to seek the adulation of others, and sometimes financial reward, for those accomplishments. Perhaps we enhance our appearance or physique, or aggressively climb the corporate ladder, to be noticed or envied by others. Although we may tire of others boasting in themselves, we may not even notice how we boast in ourselves. It is easy to forget that our salvation is an unearned and undeserved gift of God, and that all we have is from God (Romans 8:31-32; Ephesians 1:3).

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law [*of Moses*]**.** (Romans 3:27-28)

Let us not become boastful, challenging [provoking] **one another, envying one another.** (Galatians 5:26)

There is room for a particular kind of boasting, however. We should boast in the Lord God. We are not to boast in what we have done for Him, however, but in what He has done for us through Christ's work at the cross; we are to share the truth and blessings of God and His word. In a similar type of boasting, Paul proudly spoke of other believers for their faithfulness and walk for Christ, while giving credit to God (II Thessalonians 1:3-4). However, instead of letting everyone know how often we pray, how much money or time we give to the Lord, or how many souls we think that we have led to Christ, we should be quietly (inwardly) thankful for what God is accomplishing through us for His purposes.

But by His [*God's*] **doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."** (I Corinthians 1:30-31)

But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends. (II Corinthians 10:17-18)

Regarding being inwardly thankful, let us consider Mary who demonstrated her humility in such an amazing way. As part of God's plan, He chose Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph (who was in the line of David in accordance with prophecy— Matthew 1:1-17; Ezekiel 37:24-28), to be the mother of His only Son in human form. In the account in Luke 1:26-38, we learn that the angel Gabriel told Mary, who was still a virgin, that she would miraculously conceive the Son of God. What was Mary's response? She did not ask why God would choose her and she did not gloat for being chosen. Instead, she humbly responded to Gabriel that she was the bondslave of the Lord and was ready for God to do what the angel had said.

Later, in Luke 2:8-20, we have the account of the shepherds soon after the birth of Jesus. After the shepherds related how the angel of the Lord had appeared to them and told them about the birth of the Savior of Israel, those present with Mary in the stable were in wonderment at the things that the shepherds told them. Mary, however, treasured those things, *pondering them in her heart* (Luke 2:19). Would we humbly respond in such a way to such amazing things of God, or would we tell the world through social media, probably with some pride and embellishment (i.e., boasting)?

Being Arrogant

Arrogance is a display of presumptuous or insulting (insolent) behavior through manner or speech by those who are convinced of their own importance. An arrogant person is one who is overbearingly proud. Bragging is a common demonstration of arrogance. Being arrogant, therefore, is a form of boasting. As with boasting, we may not even be aware of the ways in which we are portraying our arrogance.

Amongst brethren, arrogance presents itself in many ways, though most of us would refuse to consider ourselves as being arrogant. We have separated ourselves into many denominations based on different understandings of Scripture (and because of differing traditions), and it is not uncommon for brethren of one denomination to behave arrogantly toward brethren of another denomination. Paul reprimanded the Corinthian believers, calling them carnal, for dividing themselves according to their personal preferences (I Corinthians 3:1-7). He also had a stern warning for Gentile brethren who thought they were superior to the

Jews because they had rejected their Messiah (Romans 11:17-21). How often do we make arrogant judgments regarding others?

> **My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?** (James 2:1-4)

Believers have done the same thing regarding political party affiliation. Somehow, one's faith, or one's sincerity of faith, has been tied to one or another political party and strong divisions ensue between brethren. We should remember that God is sovereign and truly in control (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17), and should reconsider whether we should even be members of a political party regardless of the country we live in.

Even making plans can be a symptom of arrogance. We should make our plans with humility, realizing that God is working things out according to His will and not our own will (Romans 8:28-30; Philippians 2:12-13). Another display of arrogance that unfortunately is common among brethren toward each other or to non-believers is using knowledge, or presumed knowledge, to belittle others or as a verbal weapon. Furthermore, we should not act or react toward each other with arrogance, remembering that through love we should humbly consider the needs of others first (Philippians 2:3-4).

> **Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.** (I Corinthians 8:1-2)

> **Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.** (I Corinthians 13:4-5)

> **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.** (James 4:13-16)

Having a High Opinion of Oneself

Thinking that we are somehow special (e.g., smarter, wiser, more accomplished, more blessed, etc.) in contrast to others is another, though perhaps less obvious, form of arrogance. Generally, we have a low opinion about those who come across as thinking they are better than everyone else. However, our own words and actions often reveal an inward haughtiness that we may not realize that we have. What does Scripture say about this?

Too often some brethren consider themselves spiritually better than others. We may feel that because we study the Bible more often, do more work for the Lord, have a better understanding of Scripture than other brethren, or associate ourselves with people we consider to be important (I Corinthians 3:18-23), that we will receive more rewards or have a higher position in heaven than our fellow brethren. Unfortunately, such thinking demonstrates a misunderstanding of grace. We were saved by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9; II Thessalonians 2:13-14), we were given a measure of faith by the grace of God (Romans 12:3), what

we understand about the things of God is by the grace of God (Ephesians 1:15-21; Luke 24:44-45; Acts 16:14), and everything we have is by the grace of God (Romans 11:34-36; I Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 5:20). We did not earn, or deserve, any of these things. We need to dial down our self-importance—humble ourselves—and be thankful to God.

> **For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed** [ignorant] **of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening** [blindness] **has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** (Romans 11:25)

> **For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.** (Romans 12:3)

> **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** (Romans 12:16)

> **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.** (I Corinthians 10:12)

> **Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.** (Galatians 6:2-3)

Being Judgmental

If we have an inflated opinion about ourselves, it is usually manifested in a judgmental attitude and behavior toward others. This type of judgment is one of condemnation toward other people. Because of their words or actions, we feel they are worthless, deserving of punishment, or possibly even undeserving of salvation. As accusers we either believe that we would not do such things or are simply blind to the fact that we actually do them. Brethren, the motives of our heart will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, so we need to leave such judgment in the hands of God (II Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10).

> **"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."** (Matthew 7:1-5)

> **Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.** (Romans 2:1-2)

> **Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.** (I Corinthians 4:5)

Taking Justice into Our Own Hands

A judgmental attitude can easily lead to a desire for retribution. As noted earlier, God wants us to forgive others because He has forgiven us. This forgiveness leaves no room for taking justice into our own hands. We need to take a close look at ourselves on this matter. Brethren, how often have we wanted to pay someone

back for a wrong, or perceived wrong, that they committed against us? How often have we actually done so? This is a common reaction for many of us, but it is a reaction derived from our sin nature.

Wanting a person to suffer for committing a wrong against us is another symptom of pride. Fighting for our personal rights is self-centered and is contrary to the will of God. This applies whether the perpetrator is a believer or not. From God's perspective we are not to treat nonbelievers differently than we treat believers—that would be hypocrisy (Galatians 6:9-10).

Instead of retribution, we are exhorted to *not* take into count a wrong suffered or take our own revenge. We are, however, exhorted to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us. These things may seem impossible, but they are what God wants from us. We can do them because we have the Holy Spirit within us (Romans 8:9-11), so we need to humble ourselves before God and let the love of God and of Christ shine through us. Furthermore, we need to leave justice in the hands of God.

> **"But I** [Jesus] **say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either."** (Luke 6:27-29)

> **Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.** (I Corinthians 13:4-5)

> **Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.** (I Corinthians 6:7-8)

> **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:17-21)

Why Should We Be Humble?

Hopefully, we have seen, at least within the limited scope of this investigation, what the word of God says about how we should be humble through our thoughts and behavior, in contrast to thinking and exhibiting prideful traits. Brethren, it is highly doubtful that any of us is always humble. Sin, unfortunately, will always get in the way and pride will manifest itself from time to time. However, it should be our desire to live humble lives and not let sin be master over us (Romans 6:12-14).

It is one thing to know *how* to be humble, but *why* should we endeavor to be humble? Because of our sin nature, we cannot just will ourselves to be humble. If we were able to do so, then there would be much room to be proud of our humility; pride would win. To be truly humble, I believe that we need to recognize and understand the grace and sovereign will of God. Furthermore, we should never forget the humility demonstrated by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:3-8)

For us to actually live humble lives as exhorted in Scripture, we first need to believe the gospel of salvation—without the Holy Spirit working in us we are unable to live a life that is pleasing to God (I Corinthians 2:11-16; Romans 8:1-17). Subsequently, as we grow as children of God, we need to acknowledge our natural condition, understand that our salvation is a gift of God, recognize that it is God who opens our eyes to understanding, and believe in our heart that God is sovereign in all things.

Admitting Our Natural Condition

Brethren, as explained in Chapter 2, we need to recognize who we are before God. It should be very humbling to remember who we were before we were saved, and who we are now because we are saved. Prior to believing the gospel of salvation, every person is dead in sin and an enemy of God (Romans 5:6-11). Even after salvation we retain our sin nature, so we will continue to sin. We should be humbled by this truth because God loves us despite our sin and has blessed us with all spiritual blessings—He sees us as alive in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-7; Colossians 2:8-14). However, we are not to desire to sin; instead, we are exhorted to flee from sin and sinful temptations (Romans 6:1-14; I Timothy 6:9-11).

And you [*brethren*] **were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air** [*Satan*]**, of the spirit that is now working in the sons** [children] **of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions** [sins]**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** (Ephesians 2:1-7)

Flee immorality [fornication]**. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.** (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form [appearance] **of evil.** (I Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Recognizing our own sinfulness and understanding that everything good that we have is by the grace of God should humble us (Luke 5:8). It should also inspire us to be less judgmental and to have a more forgiving attitude toward others. Paul remembered who he was before he was saved. Although a leader in the Jewish religion and respected by his peers, he was actually God's leading enemy as he tried to destroy the church of God (Philippians 3:1-7; Acts 22:1-5; Galatians 1:13-14).

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

For I [*Paul*] **am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.** (I Corinthians 15:9)

After his salvation and during his ministry, Paul understood that he (and every believer) was still a sinner in whom was an ongoing spiritual battle (Romans 7:14 – 8:4), and that he was an apostle purely by the grace of God (Galatians 1:1). This awareness of his own shortcomings played a part in how he conducted his ministry and why he exhorted the brethren to walk worthy of their salvation.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:21-25)

To me, the very least of all saints [*believers*]**, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable** [unsearchable] **riches of Christ.** (Ephesians 3:8)

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost [first]**, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.** (I Timothy 1:15-16)

Understanding that Our Salvation is a Gift of God

We need to understand that our salvation and our sure hope of eternal life is from God and according to His will, and not of ourselves. Because of our pride we may claim, or at least believe, that we are saved because we exercised our free will—we are convinced that God saved us because of our own decision or choice. Brethren, this is not what Scripture says.

We are not saved because we received Christ by exercising our own free will. Prior to salvation, our so-called free will is dictated by our natural sin nature—it cannot decide or choose to believe the truth of God because we are completely dead (with no spark of life) in sin (Romans 8:1-8; I Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3). We receive Christ (we are in Him and He is in us—Ephesians 2:4-6; Romans 8:1, 9-11) when we believe the gospel of salvation, and we are able to believe the gospel because God chose us for salvation from the beginning. If this were not the case, then no one would be saved.

Brethren, we need to humbly realize that our salvation is purely by the will and grace of God. We were dead in sin until God, by His matchless grace, opened our eyes to our need for salvation and enabled us, through His Holy Spirit, to believe the truth of Christ's death for our sins. We are saved not because we chose to be saved, but because God chose us to be saved. This is a truth that is difficult for many of us to grasp or believe because pride gets in our way—we naturally want to take credit for our salvation. Please carefully consider the following passages and ask yourself, "Who chose whom?"

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right [*privilege*] **to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.** (John 1:12-13; see also John 6:37, 44, 65)

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you [*Jews—the people of Israel*] **first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of**

eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"[3] **When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** (Acts 13:46-48)

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called [*saved*] **according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.** (Romans 8:28-30)

For consider your calling [*salvation*]**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame** [confound] **the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."** (I Corinthians 1:26-31)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons [children] **through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us** [made us accepted] **in the Beloved.** (Ephesians 1:3-6)

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Thessalonians 2:13-14)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [sins]**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:4-9)

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and

[3] A column note in the NASB (and in KJV editions), added for study purposes, attributes this quote to combined excerpts from Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, which are prophecies regarding Christ and His kingdom that are yet to be fulfilled; therefore, *You* is capitalized in this version to signify Christ. However, I am convinced that Paul was not referring to those or any other prophecies but to a command he received (as he said) from our ascended Lord concerning his ministry as the chosen apostle of Christ and of God to the Gentiles and that the pronoun *You* should not be capitalized (see Acts 9:15-16; Colossians 1:3-8; Galatians 1:1; Romans 11:13).

renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

Recognizing that God Opens Our Eyes to Understanding

As just mentioned, we are only able to understand the gospel of salvation if God enables us, through His Holy Spirit, to believe the truth of Christ's death for our sins (II Thessalonians 2:13). In fact, there is no truth concerning God that we are able to believe unless He opens our eyes to that truth. It is very humbling for us to admit this, and I am afraid too many of us do not do so. We would rather believe that we understand the things of God because we are smart, because we study the Bible diligently, or because of some other personal reason. Why is this? It is because of pride—it is our nature to do so. Brethren, we ought to be thankful to God, not only for our salvation but for any measure of understanding that He has given us.

Then He [*Jesus*] **took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.** (Luke 18:31-34)

Now He [*Jesus*] **said to them** [*the disciples*]**, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.** (Luke 24:44-45)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Now we [*believers*] **have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining** [comparing] **spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man** [*nonbeliever*] **does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised** [discerned]**.** (I Corinthians 2:12-14)

For this reason I [*Paul*] **too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart** [understanding] **may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His** [*God's*] **calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints** [*believers*]**, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** (Ephesians 1:15-21)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will and in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so the you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every

good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Recognizing God's Sovereignty

So, our salvation is by the will of God, and our measure of understanding of the things of God is by His will. These are just two components of God's sovereign nature. Brethren, God the Father is the Almighty God. He has been and always will be the King of kings and the Lord of lords—God is the Sovereign of the universe (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 103:19; Isaiah 46:9-10; 55:11).

I [*Paul*] **charge you** [*Timothy*] **in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He** [*God*] **who is the blessed and only Sovereign** [Potentate]**, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him** [*God*] **be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.** (I Timothy 6:13-16)

Perhaps most believers agree or at least will say that God is sovereign; however, in our daily experience, most of us do not really believe that He is sovereign in all things. Through our attitude, conversations, and prayers, we too often demonstrate our belief that God, somehow, is subject to our will instead of us being subject to His will. Please think about this to see whether it is so. Also, consider the following passages that are just a handful of the multitude of verses throughout Scripture that describe or reveal the sovereignty of God.

What shall we say then? There is no injustice [unrighteousness] **with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.** (Romans 9:14-16)

For I [*Paul*] **am confident of this very thing, that He** [*God*] **who began a good work in you** [*believers*] **will perfect** [perform] **it until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 1:6)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work [do] **for His good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:6-7)

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Brethren, we need to recognize who God is and humble ourselves before Him—we need to submit to His sovereign will. By doing so we will experience the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension (Philippians 4:4-9).

Humble or Proud?

Humility versus pride—Scripture makes a great distinction between these two traits. Keeping in mind all the preceding verses and passages, please consider the following questions. Is it more humbling to:

- Think of ourselves first, or consider others first?
- Consider ourselves special, or realize everything we have is from God?
- Insist on having our piece of the pie (figuratively or literally), or share it or even give it up?
- Wish we had more, or be content with what we have?
- Help others for recognition or praise, or help them because they are in need and because it is the right thing to do?
- Boast in our achievements, or quietly thank God for working through us?
- Ridicule or disparage others, or say and do things that uplift others?
- Demand or exact justice for a wrong that we suffered, or leave judgment and vengeance to God?
- Think that God is subject to our will, or acknowledge and sincerely believe that we are subject to His will?

I hope you agree that the latter alternatives demonstrate the humility that God desires us to exercise in our daily lives. Brethren, we are exhorted to walk worthy of our salvation in which we were called by God to Himself. To do so we must humble ourselves before God and walk with humility. This will require regular assessments of ourselves because it is so easy to fall prey to pride.

Chapter 7

How Else Should We Walk?

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you [*brethren*] **and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His** [*God's*] **will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints** [*believers*] **in Light.** (Colossians 1:9-12)

Our Daily Walk

I have hopefully set a foundation to help us understand how to walk worthy of our salvation. I sincerely believe that walking in love and humility will put us on the right path to pleasing God—being obedient to Him—in our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, I am convinced that God has told us what He expects of us in our daily walk, and there are many more exhortations and examples specific to our walk that we will explore in this chapter.

In the first chapter I defined our *walk* as applying what we know to our everyday lives. It is about our behavior or conduct as we lead our lives in response to what God has done for us. The following verses contain the Greek word *peripateo* that is usually translated as *walk* but also as *behave*, *conduct yourselves*, or similar words depending on the Bible version.[1] With the exceptions of walking in love (addressed in Chapter 5) and walking according to Paul's example (addressed in Chapter 8), I will examine each of these exhortations in the first part of this chapter. It should become apparent that the different instructions regarding our walk often overlap in their meaning and application.

- Walk in Christ (Colossians 2:6)
  - Walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1)
  - Walk worthy of our Lord (Colossians 1:10)
  - Walk worthy of God (I Thessalonians 2:12)
- Walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16)
- Walk in love (Ephesians 5:2)
- Walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4)
- Walk honestly (Romans 13:13; I Thessalonians 4:12)
- Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8)
- Walk in good works (Ephesians 2:10)
- Walk in wisdom (Ephesians 5:15; Colossians 4:5)
- Walk by faith and not by sight (II Corinthians 5:7)
- Walk according to Paul's example (Philippians 3:17)

Brethren, exhortations concerning our walk as members of the body of Christ were received by Paul from our Lord Jesus Christ and should be understood as the same as commands (I Thessalonians 2:13; 4:1-12; II Thessalonians 3:4-13; I Timothy 1:18-19). Therefore, we need to consider them very seriously, take them to

[1] Five times the word *walk* is translated from *stoikeo* that means to walk (or live) orderly or by rule (Acts 21:24; Romans 4:12; Galatians 5:25; 6:16; Philippians 3:16).

heart, and endeavor to obey them. Numerous other exhortations and examples regarding how God wants and expects us to live that do not contain the Greek word for *walk* are provided for us in Paul's letters and supported in principle throughout Scripture. I will address some of them in the remainder of the chapter.

You will see that all the key verses that directly concern our walk as members of the body of Christ are from Paul's letters because his letters are addressed to us. I think it is important to realize that the Greek word *peripateo*, as it relates to a daily walk, occurs only a few times outside of Paul's letters. They pertain to walking in the light rather than in darkness (John 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35; I John 1:6-7; 2:11), walking in the truth (II John 1:4; III John 1:3-4), and walking in love (II John 1:6)—subjects that are also thoroughly addressed, in the context of our walk, by Paul in his letters. Besides the three references in the book of John, all other occurrences of *peripateo* in Matthew through John refer to physically walking.

The above referenced verses in the book and letters of John are prophetic and directly apply to future kingdom believers (after the rapture), who will be sinless (I John 3:4-9; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27; Hebrews 8:7-12; 10:14-18; James 2:8-13), and were not written to members of the body of Christ. Their walk will distinguish them from nonbelievers, which is not the case in this dispensation of grace because we sin and often walk according to the flesh. Those who walk in darkness, according to lies, and without love—i.e., anyone who sins—will be proven to be nonbelievers (I John 1:5-10; 2:3-6, 9-11, 15-17, 29; 3:10). Their perfect walk is explained more fully in Chapter 4 and in Appendix C.

Therefore, if we truly want to know and understand God's instructions to us regarding how He wants us to conduct our lives (walk) as His children, we need to direct our attention to Paul's letters first. Then we will see how the principles of our walk are supported throughout Scripture. This is why I explained and emphasized the importance and distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message in the first chapters of this book.

Walk in Christ

> **Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your** [the] **faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude** [thanksgiving]**.** (Colossians 2:6-7)

Perhaps the most important, or at least the most inclusive, exhortation specific to our daily walk that we will investigate is to walk in Christ. Please note that this passage does not say that we should follow or walk *with Jesus* (as His disciples did) but to walk *in Him*—in our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, we are in Christ (members of His body) and He is in us (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Romans 8:1; Colossians 1:24-27). These are truths that Jesus did not tell His disciples during His earthly ministry because this relationship did not apply to them. Yes, in John 15:1-11, Jesus instructed His disciples to *abide* in Him and for them to let Jesus *abide* in them. This exhortation, however, had to do with their faith and their walk so that they would bear much fruit—they were to stand for Him and depend on Him (see also I John 2:1-29). This is different than us being in Christ—members of His body—and Christ being in us, which applies to all believers through our salvation regardless of our daily walk.

I was taught *discipleship* in some of the churches I attended, i.e., how to be a good disciple (follower) of Jesus as described in the books of Matthew through John, as well as in the letters of James and John. Never in Paul's letters, however, are believers referred to as disciples. The Greek word for *disciple* and *disciples* (*matheetees*) does not appear in Paul's letters, so Bible versions that include *disciple*, *disciples*, or *discipleship* in his letters are incorrectly translated or interpreted.

Brethren, we are not to *follow* Christ as the disciples did because He is in us. Every blessing we have as believers, beginning with our salvation, is based on the work of Christ at the cross—His death, burial, and resurrection for us. Therefore, we are to walk in Him. Paul did, however, exhort the Corinthian believers (and us) to imitate (follow) himself as he imitated Christ (e.g., I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9). He was using himself as an example of how to walk in Christ that will be investigated in the next chapter.

> **Let us behave properly** [walk honestly] **as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** (Romans 13:13-14)

To further explain our walk in Him, Paul exhorted that we *put on* our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, we are to clothe ourselves with Christ—consider Him to be part of our being—so that our walk properly represents our new self in Christ instead of our old self through deeds of the flesh. In direct correlation with putting on Christ, Paul also exhorted the brethren to put on:

- Our new self in Christ (Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:5-10);
- A heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness (Colossians 3:12-13);
- Love (Colossians 3:14);
- The armor of light (Romans 13:12); and
- The full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17; I Thessalonians 5:8).

In Colossians 2:6, Paul told the Colossian brethren (and us) that they should walk in Christ because of their salvation in Christ (they had *received* and been *accepted* in Christ the moment they believed the gospel of salvation—Romans 5:11; 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:6). Therefore, I believe that the exhortation to walk in Christ is the same as our instruction (command) to walk worthy of, or as befitting, our salvation, which is the subject of this book and which will be very briefly summarized under the following exhortations about walking in a worthy manner.

Walk Worthy of Our Calling

> **Therefore I** [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you** [*brethren*] **to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [*salvation*] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** (Ephesians 4:1-3)

The first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesian brethren tells us what God has done for us through Christ and God's eternal plan regarding the message of His grace. Regardless how faithful we may or may not be, every believer is blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ because of our salvation in Him (Ephesians 1:3). The last three chapters of Ephesians tell us how God expects us to live in response to the salvation that He graciously bestowed on us. Most of the numerous exhortations of a worthy walk presented in Ephesians, as well as many others throughout Paul's letters, are addressed in this chapter and other chapters in this book.

Walk Worthy of Our Lord

> **For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you** [*brethren*] **and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His** [*God's*] **will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.** (Colossians 1:9-10)

Brethren, we need to know and understand what God has done for us to understand, and do, what He expects of us. Too often believers are in search of the will of God for their lives, but He has already revealed His will through His word (II Timothy 3:16-17). If we walk worthy of our Lord, according to what God has told us to do based on our Lord's work at the cross for us, then we will not only be living lives that are pleasing to God and our Lord Jesus Christ but living in such a way that will bear fruit in every good work. We are ambassadors for Christ and should represent Him accordingly (II Corinthians 5:20-21).

> **But whatever things were gain to me** [*Paul*]**, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law** [*of Moses*]**, but that which is through faith in** [the faith of] **Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.** (Philippians 3:7-11)

> **"I** [*Paul*] **have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in** [the faith of] **the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."** (Galatians 2:20)

Walk Worthy of God

> **You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.** (I Thessalonians 2:10-12)

If we walk worthy of our salvation and of our Lord, then we will be walking worthy of God who saved us into His spiritual realm. We need to remember that, beginning at the moment of our salvation, we are in Christ who is at the right hand of God in the heavens—we are citizens of heaven (Ephesians 1:18-21; 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20-21). All believers are children of God, and our behavior reflects on the character of God our Father. Are we walking (behaving) in such a way that properly represents God and brings glory to Him?

Walk by the Spirit

As children of God who believe the gospel of salvation, the Holy Spirit dwells in us (see Appendix B). Therefore, from God's perspective, we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit regardless of how we actually live. Consequently, God considers us as those who walk according to the Spirit because we are no longer in the flesh. This is all God's work in us and are God-given blessings of our salvation in Christ.

> **For what the Law** [*of Moses*] **could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering** [*sacrifice*] **for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement** [righteousness] **of the Law might be fulfilled in us** [*believers*]**, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** (Romans 8:3-4)

> **However, you** [*brethren*] **are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the** [*our*] **body is dead because of sin, yet the** [*our*] **spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him** [*God*] **who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ**

Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:9-11)

In the context of the above passages, walking according to the Spirit is a statement of fact. It is our position in Christ that is not based on what we are doing but on what God did for us, just as we are sealed for eternal life because we are children of God (Ephesians 1:13-14). That is, if we are saved then the Holy Spirit is in us and we, therefore, walk according to the Spirit and are no longer dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-6). However, we are also exhorted to walk experientially—day by day—according to the Spirit. Just as we are to walk worthy of our salvation because we are saved, we are to walk by, or in, the Holy Spirit because He is in us. In fact, we cannot walk worthy without walking by the Spirit.

But I [*Paul*] **say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** (Galatians 5:16)

If [*Because*] **we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.** (Galatians 5:25)

If, as believers, we do not experientially walk according to the Spirit, then we are walking according to the flesh. We are living according to the sinful nature that we were born with and disregarding the new nature of Christ that we receive when we believe the gospel of salvation. In Galatians 5:17-21, we see that walking according to the flesh is evident by the sinful deeds we exhibit; such deeds (and the desire to do them) are impediments to our daily walk as will be addressed in Chapter 13.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5:22-24)

In this passage, the fruit of the Spirit is provided in contrast to the deeds of the flesh that are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. Please note that it does not say *fruits* of the Spirit, as if many kinds of fruit can be derived from one tree from which we can pick and choose as we wish. Instead, the fruit of the Spirit is the outward expression, through attitude and actions, of the working of the Spirit of God within us. Just as a fruit tree produces fruit if it has a good root system that is properly nourished (and is regularly pruned to promote new healthy and productive growth), we will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit if we properly nourish our God-given foundation in Christ through the word of God and endeavor to not live according to the deeds of the flesh.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (long-suffering), kindness (gentleness), goodness, faithfulness (faith), gentleness (meekness), and self-control (temperance).[2] God wants us to walk, or conduct ourselves on a daily basis, according to the Spirit. We must realize, however, that we are not in competition with our fellow brethren to see who is walking better than others (Galatians 5:26). We cannot boast in our salvation because it was by the grace of God, nor are we to boast in our works because any good that we do is by the will and power of God (I Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13).

Each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is *briefly* described below. Each one could easily be a study in itself. I encourage you to read the listed Scripture references and associated context, check cross references if provided in your Bible, and look up these words in your concordance or other reference material.

[2] These words describing the fruit of the Spirit are listed as such in modern Bible versions including the NASB, the *New International Version*, and the *English Standard Version*. The words in parentheses are equivalent words in the KJV and *New King James Version*.

Love

Therefore be imitators [followers] **of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up of us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.** (Ephesians 5:1-2)

It is probably no coincidence that *love* is listed first, because all the other components of the fruit of the Spirit depend on love. To show or live according to love in our daily walk, we need to understand the source of love and how the Bible describes love, which are presented in Chapter 5. I think it is beneficial to briefly summarize the love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ for all believers as follows:

- God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins (Romans 5:8; I John 4:10), and Christ loves us so much that He died for us (I Corinthians 15:1-4; II Corinthians 5:14-15).
- Love is the greatest gift of God to us (I Corinthians 13:4-13).
- We love, because God first loved us (I John 4:19).
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

In response to God's love for us and the love demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross, we should do the following as part of our walk in the Spirit:

- Walk in love (Ephesians 5:1-2).
- Love without hypocrisy (Romans 12:9).
- Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another (Romans 13:8; I John 4:11).
- Love our neighbors as ourselves—love does no wrong to a neighbor (Romans 13:9-10).
- Serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13).
- Show tolerance for one another in love (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:14-16).
- Abound in love for our fellow brethren and for all people (I Thessalonians 3:12).
- Do all things in love (I Corinthians 16:14).

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with [in] **the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Joy

But even if I [*Paul*] **am being poured out as a drink offering** [*i.e., prepared to be put to death*] **upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.** (Philippians 2:17-18)

Joy is commonly defined as a feeling or emotion of great pleasure (delight) and happiness, primarily tied to good circumstances. For believers, it is more of an inner sense of well-being or delight based on what we have in Christ and is not necessarily dependent on circumstances. Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit and should be experienced and exhibited by believers.

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while in prison in Rome (his crime was speaking the truth in his service to God), not knowing if he would be released or put to death. As it turned out, he was eventually put to death (Philippians 1:12-14, 19-24; 2:17; II Timothy 4:6-8). Despite his circumstances, and instead of lamenting over his imprisonment or seeking justice, his letter is often considered to be the book of joy. As examples for us, Paul expressed his joy and rejoicing in his letter to the Philippian believers as follows:

- He thanked God in all his remembrance of them and their participation in the gospel (Philippians 1:3-8).
- He rejoiced when Christ was truthfully proclaimed, despite the motives of the teachers (Philippians 1:15-18).
- He desired that his ministry and fellowship could continue with them for their progress and joy in the faith (Philippians 1:21-26).
- He derived joy from their love and unity in the faith (Philippians 2:1-2).
- He rejoiced and shared his joy with them and urged them to do the same toward him (Philippians 2:14-18).
- He asked them to receive his coworker and messenger Epaphroditus with joy (Philippians 2:25-30).
- He encouraged them to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 3:1; 4:4).

Furthermore, Paul loved and appreciated the Philippian believers so much that he considered them to be his joy and crown, perhaps the most heart-felt compliment a person could give (Philippians 4:1). He expressed the same loving sentiment for the Thessalonian brethren (I Thessalonians 2:19-20). In this figure of speech Paul was expressing his great love for the Philippian brethren and his thanksgiving to God for how they were growing in the Lord and standing for the faith despite their circumstances that included terrible persecution—they were a blessing to Paul (Philippians 1:3-5, 27-30).

We should remember and be encouraged that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Do we know this joy, and do we express it in our daily walk?

And my soul shall rejoice [be joyful] **in the Lord; it shall exult** [rejoice] **in His salvation.** (Psalm 35:9)

Peace

Let the peace of Christ [God][3] **rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.** (Colossians 3:15)

Peace is a part of the fruit of the Spirit, so God desires that we know and experience it. Besides love, perhaps inner peace (contentment) is what most people seek. However, life is often very difficult, and we struggle to be at peace. Instead, we tend to be weighed down by the opposite of peace, such as being worried about something or anything, or being in strife with others.

[3] The NASB says *the peace of Christ*, whereas the KJV says *the peace of God*. The latter may be more correct based on the context of the passage, but Paul conveyed to believers the grace and peace of God *and* Christ in the opening statement of all his letters. Therefore, I believe that the difference in translations is inconsequential.

As with joy, the peace spoken of in Galatians 5:22 is not dependent on our circumstances—it is influenced from within. We should remind ourselves that Paul was in prison in Rome when he encouraged his coworker Timothy as well as the Ephesian, Philippian, and Colossian brethren to know the peace of God and live accordingly (II Timothy 2:22; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 4:6-9; Colossians 3:15).

Understanding the source of peace is the key to living in peace. Brethren, we have peace with God because of our salvation. Before we were saved, we were enemies of God. If we believe that Christ died for our sins, His shed blood reconciles us to God—God made peace with us (Romans 5:1-11; Colossians 1:19-20). We are able to know and experience the peace *of* God in our daily lives because we have peace *with* God.

God is the author of peace (Romans 15:33; Ephesians 1:2). Therefore, our lives should demonstrate the peace of God. We can know the peace of God daily by turning our concerns over to Him through prayer, thinking about what He has done for us, and living our lives according to His will (Philippians 4:6-9; Colossians 3:1-3, 12-17). Furthermore, we should:

- Pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another (Romans 14:19).
- Live in peace with each other (II Corinthians 13:11; I Thessalonians 5:13).
- Endeavor to preserve the unity of the Spirit with each other in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- Pursue peace—take hold of it (II Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; I Peter 3:10-12).
- Be content regardless of our circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:6; II Corinthians 12:10).

Unfortunately, experiencing the peace of God is often elusive among brethren. Many of us seem to live in fear and discontent and behave no differently than those of the world (nonbelievers) around us. Instead of understanding God's power and sovereign will, we are afraid of or even resistant to those who are in authority over us (Romans 13:1-7). Instead of putting on the full armor of God and standing firm in the truth and our freedom in Christ (Ephesians 6:10-17; I Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 5:1), we are afraid of what others may think of us or of possible persecution and suffering. Instead of believing that the word of God and His grace are sufficient and understanding that we are already blessed with all spiritual blessings (II Corinthians 12:9-10; Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 4:11-13), we are not satisfied (content) and seek more or better things. If we walk worthy of our calling, however, recognizing that our strength and ability to do so is by God's grace, then the peace of God will rule in our hearts.

> **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable** [honest]**, whatever is right** [just]**, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence** [virtue] **and if anything worthy of praise, dwell** [think] **on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:6-9)

Patience

> **We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly** [undisciplined]**, encourage** [comfort] **the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** (I Thessalonians 5:14)

Sometimes things, or mostly people, drive us crazy. How should we deal with that feeling? Well, God is exceedingly patient with His children as we often disobey Him and live according to sin. That is because He loves us and considers us to be righteous in Christ (Romans 8:10; II Corinthians 5:21).

God demonstrated His love and patience by saving Paul, who was Christ's leading enemy (I Timothy 1:15-16). Later, Paul instructed Timothy to teach the word of God with great patience and instruction (II Timothy 4:1-5). He understood that patience of spirit is better than arrogance of spirit (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

Furthermore, because God and our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated (and continue to demonstrate) their patience toward us, we should:

- Be patient with our fellow brethren in love (I Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 4:1-3).
- Be patient with everyone (I Thessalonians 5:14).
- Put on a heart of gentleness with patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other (Colossians 3:12-13).
- Patiently endure suffering that results from doing the right thing (I Peter 2:20).

> **So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.** (Colossians 3:12-13)

Kindness

> **Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander** [evil speaking] **be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:31-32)

In the KJV, the Greek word for *gentleness* in Galatians 5:22 (*kreestotees*) is also translated in other verses as *kindness*, *good*, and *goodness*; most modern versions translate it as *kindness* in this verse.[4] A kind person is one who is friendly, generous, considerate, and merciful toward others. The opposite of kindness is demonstrated through such traits as meanness, cruelty, hate, heartlessness, and vengeance. Although many believers are unkind to others through word or deed (intentionally or unintentionally), we should endeavor to never behave that way to anyone; we are commanded to not defraud, slander (insult, disparage, lie about, or speak evil of), or seek vengeance upon others (I Corinthians 6:7-8; Ephesians 4:25, 31; I Thessalonians 5:15; Colossians 3:8-9; Titus 3:1-2; Romans 12:14-21).

Brethren, we are saved by the kindness of God (Titus 3:4-7). Love is kind (I Corinthians 13:4), and through love we are exhorted to be kind and tender-hearted (compassionate) toward one another, forgiving each other just as God forgave us through Christ (Colossians 3:12-13). Kindness is a desirable quality (Proverbs 19:22; 31:26), therefore, and we should not let kindness and truth leave us (Proverbs 14:22). Additionally, we should actively demonstrate, or live according to, kindness (II Peter 1:5-7).

> **Do not let kindness** [mercy] **and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute** [understanding] **in the sight of God and man.** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

[4] *Kreestotees* is translated as *kindness* in the KJV in II Corinthians 6:6, Ephesians 2:7, Colossians 3:12, and Titus 3:4.

Goodness

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself [*Paul*] **also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.** (Romans 15:14)

Synonyms for *goodness* include virtuousness, decency, kindness, and integrity, which are all qualities we should aspire to. Our Lord God is good, and His lovingkindness (mercy) is everlasting; goodness is from the Lord (Psalm 100:4-5; 107:8-9). Despite some things for which he had to admonish the brethren in Rome, Paul was aware that they were full of goodness (Romans 15:14-16).

Upon believing the gospel of salvation, we are no longer of darkness (controlled by our sin nature); instead, we are light in the Lord (we have the nature of Christ within us). The fruit of this light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth. Living according to this light is pleasing to God, and the light of Christ will shine through us (Ephesians 5:6-14).

The opposite of expressing goodness is meanness, which includes thinking or doing things to others that are unkind, cruel, evil, or wicked. Instead, as opportunities present themselves, we should do good things not only for our fellow brethren but for everyone (Titus 3:8, 14). Furthermore, we should desire to willingly express goodness as the right thing to do instead of doing so under compulsion (Philemon 1:14).

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander [evil speaking] **be put away from you, along with all malice.** (Ephesians 4:31)

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another [*your fellow brethren*] **and for all people.** (I Thessalonians 5:15)

Faithfulness

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance [patience] **and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions** [tribulations] **which you endure.** (II Thessalonians 1:3-4)

We are saved by the grace of God through faith, and faith itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 12:3; II Thessalonians 2:13-14). We can be assured of our salvation and eternal life because God is faithful—we can count on Him and His word (I Corinthians 1:9; I Thessalonians 5:23-24; Titus 3:4-7).

The righteousness of God was demonstrated through the faith, or faithfulness, of Christ (Romans 3:21-22; Philippians 3:7-11). We were also justified by the faith of Christ (Galatians 2:16). Therefore, we should live by the faith of Christ—we should demonstrate His faithfulness as we walk in Him (Galatians 2:20). I believe that *the faith of Christ* in these referenced verses in the KJV is the correct rendering, rather than *faith in Christ* found in other Bible versions. The context of these verses does not depend on our faith that is often variable, weak, and tainted by sin—we are justified and made righteous because Christ was faithful (obedient) to God by not sinning and by dying for our sins. This is the faith in which we are to stand (Colossians 1:21-23). Our faith in God and in Christ is expressed through *believing* what Christ accomplished for us at the cross and *walking* worthy of our salvation.

It is important to God that our faith is exhibited or manifested by working through love (Galatians 5:5-6; Ephesians 1:15; II Thessalonians 1:3-4). Additionally, our faith should be sincere—from a pure heart through

love instead of fake or self-serving (I Timothy 1:5). Our faith and faithfulness should be demonstrated, among other things, by:

- Standing firm in *the* faith (I Corinthians 16:13-14; Colossians 2:4-7—KJV); that is, being unwavering in the truth of God and not following or succumbing to false doctrine (Ephesians 4:14-16; I Timothy 6:11-12; II Timothy 4:2-4; Galatians 1:6-9);
- Being devoted or committed in our service to God, pleasing to Him (I Timothy 6:20-21; II Corinthians 5:6-9);
- Being truthful and trustworthy (Ephesians 4:25; I Corinthians 4:1-2); and
- Being dependable or reliable (Colossians 4:7-9).

And although you were formerly alienated [*separated from God as nonbelievers*] **and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He** [*God*] **has now reconciled you in His** [*Christ's*] **fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him** [*God*] **holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast** [grounded and settled]**, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.** (Colossians 1:21-23)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:58)

Gentleness

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit [moderation] **be known to all men. The Lord is near** [*with and in us*]**.** (Philippians 4:4-5)

The KJV word *meekness* in Galatians 5:23 (from the Greek word *praotees*) is translated as *gentleness* in most modern Bible versions (e.g., I Corinthians 4:21; I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 2:25). Other synonyms for meekness include humbleness, moderation, and forbearance. Opposite traits of meekness or gentleness include arrogance, disdainfulness, and harshness. Words are powerful, and our words and subsequent actions tend to reveal our character. Therefore, we must evaluate ourselves regarding our motives and intentions as well as the consequences of how we speak and act with those around us. Are we being gentle, or are we arrogantly serving our own purposes? As examples of what God expects of us, we should:

- Live our lives as believers with humility and gentleness, doing what we can to preserve unity among the brethren (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- Pursue, or consciously follow, gentleness (I Timothy 6:11).
- Regard others as more important than ourselves, just as Christ did for us at the cross (Philippians 2:3-8; Romans 12:3, 16).
- Speak with grace, using words that edify instead of demean (Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 4:29; 5:3-4).
- Restore fellow brethren who err with gentleness and humility, and bear one another's burdens and forgive each other without boasting or hypocrisy (Galatians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:12-13).
- Gently and patiently correct those who are in opposition to the truth of God without being quarrelsome or judgmental (II Timothy 2:24-26).

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [meekness]**; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.**

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:1-3)

Remind them [*believers*] **to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign** [speak evil of] **no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.** (Titus 3:1-2)

Self-Control

For even though I [*Paul*] **am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.** (Colossians 2:5)

The last attribute of the fruit of the Spirit is *self-control*, which also means temperance, restraint, and self-discipline. As with all aspects of the fruit, we must scrutinize ourselves and think about what we are doing (I Corinthians 11:27-32). We are exhorted to present the members of our body as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:8-14), and doing so requires self-control because we are so apt to sin instead. As examples of exercising self-control, we should:

- Be sober-minded (awake to righteousness) and stop living according to our sinful nature (I Corinthians 15:34; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:17-24; 5:3-4, 11-12).
- Flee from sin, i.e., avoid or remove ourselves from sinful situations (I Corinthians 6:18; I Timothy 6:10-11).
- Avoid being angry or slanderous toward others (Ephesians 4:31-32; James 1:19-21).
- Be mature in our thoughts and actions (I Corinthians 13:4-7; 14:20; 16:13-14).
- Do the right thing because it is the right thing to do (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 13:7; Colossians 3:17, 23; James 4:17; I Peter 2:15, 20; 3:17; 4:19).

Paul reminded the Colossian brethren to set their minds on things above instead on things of the earth (worldly thoughts) because they had been raised up with Christ (Colossians 3:1-3). Because we are in Christ, who is at the right hand of God in the heavens, all believers are considered by God to be citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20-21); therefore, we should think and act accordingly. It is apparent that the Colossian brethren generally were already doing so, because Paul rejoiced in their good discipline and the stability of their faith in Christ. Could the same be said about us?

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men [fools] **but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.** (Ephesians 5:15-16)

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking [understanding]**; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.** (I Corinthians 14:20)

Walking by the Spirit Summarized

If [*Because*] **we live by** [in] **the Spirit, let us also walk by** [in] **the Spirit.** (Galatians 5:25)

By nature, we live according to the flesh—we sin. At the moment of salvation—when we believe the gospel of salvation that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead—God changes us from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-7). He makes us spiritually alive in the Spirit (we live by the Spirit), and we inherit the new nature of Christ (Romans 8:9-14). However, our salvation does not remove or replace our sin nature; we will have it until we die or are caught up to meet our Lord at the rapture. Consequently, our completely opposite natures—our old sin nature and our new nature in Christ—are in constant battle within us (Romans 7:14 – 8:4).

Although we will continue to sin, it is God's desire for those who believe that Christ died for us (His children) that we stop living according to sin and, instead, live according to our new nature—He wants us to walk by His Spirit (Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 5:16). Evidence of the Spirit's work through us consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The first outward expression of the fruit of the Spirit is *love*. In the absence of love—derived from the love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ—we are unable to exhibit the other aspects of the fruit. If our decisions are based on love, then joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness should automatically follow. The last is *self-control*; that is, we must evaluate and make decisions regarding our words and actions so that we live according to the Spirit and not according to our sin nature. Brethren, this requires a conscious effort on our part. Is the fruit of the Spirit evident through our words and actions?

> **So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ** [God] **rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness** [grace] **in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Colossians 3:12-17)

Walk in Newness of Life

> **Therefore we** [*believers*] **have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.** (Romans 6:4)

At the moment of our salvation, we become a new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). God spiritually changed us from being dead in sin to alive in Christ—we have been raised up with Christ and are seated in Him at the right hand of God in the heavens (Ephesians 1:18 – 2:7). Through our identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, God made us free from the condemnation of sin—we died to sin and no longer face the eternal penalty of sin (Romans 6:23; 8:1). Therefore, we are to consider ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ and live accordingly (Romans 6:5-11). We are to lay aside our old self and its deeds of the flesh and put on our new self and exhibit the righteousness of God (Colossians 3:5-11).

> **For the death that He** [*Christ*] **died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** (Romans 6:10-11)

> **But you** [*brethren*] **did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted** [is corrupt] **in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.** (Ephesians 4:20-24)

Walk Honestly

> **The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly** [walk honestly] **as in the day, not in carousing and**

drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (Romans 13:12-14)

Brethren, we are living in the dispensation of the grace of God. We are also living in an evil age (Galatians 1:3-5). This seems to be a paradox, but this is a time in the eternal plan of God when He is saving us (formerly children of wrath—Ephesians 2:1-3) despite the sinful world we live in that deserves His judgment. We are exhorted to walk honestly (as translated in the KJV), or behave properly, as in the day among our fellow brethren and toward nonbelievers. We are beacons of His light in this dark world that we will address under the next heading.

In human thought and action, sin is often associated with night; that is, we assume that darkness will hide our sinfulness. Because of our sin nature we can easily fall into or continue in the same trap. As children of God, however, He considers us as children of the day (I Thessalonians 5:5). Consequently, we are exhorted to not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11-12). Instead, we are to behave properly as in the day.

Not only are we to walk honestly among fellow brethren, but we are to do so toward nonbelievers with whom we associate. We are representatives of Christ and should endeavor to live in such a way that shows how believers should live, thus bringing glory to Him and to God our Father (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8). Are we walking as in the day or as of the night?

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly [walk honestly] **toward outsiders** [*nonbelievers*] **and not be in any need.** (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

As exhorted in the above passage, walking honestly includes leading a quiet life, attending to our own business, and working with our own hands. I believe that this addresses the difference between humility and pride, as well as the need to lead disciplined lives so that we are not an unnecessary burden on others. Do we do things to seek attention, or do we endeavor to quietly do the right thing in obedience to God? Do we gamble away our money and time, or do we perform honest work to provide for ourselves and our loved ones (I Timothy 5:8) and to be ready to help others in their time of need (Ephesians 4:28)?

Walk as Children of Light

Let no one deceive you with empty [vain] **words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons** [children] **of disobedience** [*nonbelievers*]**. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.** (Ephesians 5:6-8)

As just noted under walking honestly, God considers us to be children of the day. To expand on this truth, God made us as light in the Lord—we are children of light. Furthermore, we are children of light because we are children of God who is light—He is righteous, and in Him there is no darkness (I John 1:5). As God in the flesh, Jesus proclaimed that He is the light of the world—He embodied the righteousness of God—and prophetically stated that His disciples would walk in the light (sinless) and not in the darkness (sinfulness) of

the world (John 8:12; 12:35-36; I John 1:6-7; 2:9-11).[5] We, too, despite our sin nature, should endeavor to live each day as in the light because we are children of light.

The light of God exposes the deeds (works) of darkness—those things done in accordance with sin; therefore, we are not to join with others in doing those things. We need to depend on the strength of God and the work of His Spirit in and through us by putting on the armor of light (Romans 13:12-14). We need to remember that God considers us righteous through the shed blood of Christ (Romans 3:21-22; 5:17-19; 10:8-10) and should make it our goal and desire to live in that light in obedience to God instead of in disobedience.

> **Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose** [reprove] **them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them** [*nonbelievers—Ephesians 5:3-6*] **in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on** [*through*] **you."** (Ephesians 5:11-14)

> **Do not be bound together with** *[tied or committed to*] **unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness** [unrighteousness]**, or what fellowship has light with darkness?** (II Corinthians 6:14)

Walk in Good Works

> **For we** [*believers*] **are His** [*God's*] **workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:10)

Brethren, we are saved from the consequences of our sins by the grace of God apart from any righteous or good works that we may try to do—God only requires belief in what Christ did for us at the cross (Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-9; I Corinthians 15:1-4). After we believe the gospel of salvation, however, God expects us to do good works toward fellow brethren as well as nonbelievers because He saved us to do good works (II Corinthians 9:8; Titus 2:11-14; II Timothy 3:16-17). Loving our neighbors as ourselves (covered in Chapter 5) includes being ready to do, as well as doing, good for those who are in need.

> **This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I** [*Paul*] **want you** [*Titus*] **to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.** (Titus 3:8)

> **Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us** [*believers*] **and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.** (II Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Just as we are to demonstrate goodness to not only fellow brethren but to everyone, we are to do good works even for our enemies. This is in accordance with the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Proverbs 25:21-22; Matthew 5:43-48). Loving and helping our enemy, without compulsion, is contrary to our nature—our old sin nature—but not our new nature in Christ. It is the will of God for us.

[5] Believers in the future kingdom (starting sometime after the rapture) will be sinless because God will give them a new heart of flesh and permanently cleanse them of all sin (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27; Hebrews 8:7-12). See Appendix C for more information about this.

"But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:20-21)

Walk Wisely

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men [fools] **but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.** (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Why should we walk wisely, or in wisdom? To act with wisdom is to be able to exercise discernment or good judgment based on what is true or right. God wants us to understand His will so that we are able to discern the truth from evil and not be foolish in our thoughts or actions. In Ephesians 4:17-32, we are exhorted to not walk in the futility of our mind (unwisely or foolishly), nor are we to lie or steal, be bitter or slanderous, or do anything else that would grieve the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Paul continued with the exhortation for us to avoid participating in the following things: immorality, impurity, greed, filthy talk, empty words (false doctrine or foolish speculation), or any other sinful activities (Ephesians 5:3-12). To avoid doing these things, we must walk in love (Ephesians 5:1-2) and walk wisely.

We must remember that the gospel of salvation is viewed as foolish by the nonbelieving world (I Corinthians 1:18-25). Additionally, those who stand for Christ are considered to be fools (I Corinthians 4:10). This type of foolishness is honorable to God. However, we must not be fools in any other way but be wise.

We are also exhorted to conduct ourselves with wisdom so that we can make the most of opportunities as they present themselves. It is hard to share the gospel of salvation with someone who might not be saved, or the things of God with a fellow believer, when that person knows by our words or actions that we are hypocrites—our credibility is compromised. All believers sin, so sinning in itself is not hypocritical. We should endeavor to live according to God's will but humbly recognize that we will continue to sin (see Paul's personal struggle with sin in Romans 7:7-25). However, if we are known for lying, being slanderous, getting drunk, attending wild parties, immorality, cheating, being arrogant, etc., then our hypocritical behavior is a stumbling block to our witness for Christ and is dishonoring to God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conduct yourselves with [Walk in] **wisdom toward outsiders** [*nonbelievers*]**, making the most of the opportunity.** (Colossians 4:5)

For us to truly walk wisely in this evil age, we need to know who we are in Christ (what God has done and is doing for us through Christ) and how God wants us to live (His will for us as His children). We need to endeavor to present ourselves as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, and to do so requires that we rightly divide, or accurately handle, the Scriptures (II Timothy 2:15; Romans 6:12-13; 12:1-2). God's word, rightly divided, provides all the guidance we need to live as we ought and to walk wisely and worthy of our salvation (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Walk by Faith and Not by Sight

Therefore, being always of good courage [confident]**, and knowing that while we** [*believers*] **are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I** [*Paul*] **say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home** [present] **with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him** [*God—I Thessalonians 2:4; 4:1*]**.** (II Corinthians 5:6-9)

This passage presents a fact—a positional truth based on our salvation—and not an exhortation, that we walk by faith and not by sight. In the context of this passage, Paul affirmed to the Corinthian brethren (and all believers) that even though they were in Christ while physically living on this earth, their future would be with Christ in the heavens, which is a place that they could not see. Therefore, he exhorted them to desire to live their lives (i.e., to walk by faith) as pleasing to God until they went home. We need to assess ourselves to see if we are actually walking by faith so that we, too, will please God.

> **Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.** (II Corinthians 4:16-18)

The phrase *seeing is believing* does not hold true regarding the things of God and the mind of man. God demonstrated His power through mighty miracles to Pharaoh and yet he did not change his ways. Even though the people of Israel sought after signs from God before they would believe Him or His prophets (John 4:48; I Corinthians 1:22), their failure to do so after witnessing the miracles of God is chronicled throughout Scripture (e.g., Numbers 14:22-23; John 12:37-40; Acts 2:22-23; 7:35-43). Only those who already believed God by faith recognized His miraculous signs and wonders. However, the people who believed God did not depend on signs to believe in Him, because they knew by faith that God was faithful and would do everything He said He would do.

> **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction** [evidence] **of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.** (Hebrews 11:1-2)

Many people in the world today are looking for signs by God (or their concept of God) to believe in something or to establish their faith, whatever it may be. Even many believers, as well as those who falsely claim to know Christ, are looking for signs and miracles and participate in gatherings devoted to sign gifts and miracles. They claim to be able to speak in tongues and to heal all sorts of sickness and disease, and point to world events, as proof that they are witnessing signs of God.

Brethren, although God certainly did demonstrate His power through the agency of men, such as through Moses and the prophets, His Son, and His apostles (including Paul during the early part of his ministry), He is not doing so in this dispensation of grace. Mankind has proven itself incapable of recognizing God through His miracles. Paul demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit through all kinds of miracles, including raising the dead (Acts 20:7-12), but in his first letter to the Corinthians (who were abusing sign gifts such as speaking in tongues—I Corinthians 14:1-40) he said that the sign gifts would pass away (I Corinthians 13:8-13). Indeed, they did pass away during Paul's ministry as evidenced by the total lack of references to sign gifts in his later books and the fact he was no longer able to heal his coworkers (Philippians 2:25-27; I Timothy 5:23; II Timothy 4:20). The passing of sign gifts, as further addressed in Chapter 14, coincided with the completion of the revelations to Paul concerning the mystery and the gospel of grace. God's word to us, therefore, is complete and nothing else is needed for God to reveal Himself to us in this dispensation of His grace (Ephesians 3:8-12; Colossians 1:25-27).

Instead of looking for signs, therefore, we are to walk by faith and not by sight. How do we do this? If we *believe* what God has done for us through Christ (we cannot *see* what He has done or will do for us), then we ought to live accordingly by faith as demonstrated by the following exhortations:

- We were saved by the grace of God, so we should work out our salvation by living above reproach (Philippians 2:12-16).
- God has reconciled us to Himself, so we should reconcile ourselves to Him (II Corinthians 5:18-20).
- We have been sanctified, or set apart, by God, so we should live sanctified lives for Him (II Timothy 2:19-21).
- We have been made righteous by God, so we should present ourselves as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13).
- We have been bought by the precious blood of Christ, so we should glorify God in our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19-20).
- Christ is in us, so we should put on Christ (Romans 13:14).
- God has forgiven us, so we should forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).
- God has bestowed upon us His strength and power, so we should be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10-17).
- God made us complete in Christ, so we should not disregard the love, forgiveness, and strength of God by dwelling on past mistakes or being overcome by guilt or anxiety—we should depend on Him (Romans 8:26-28; Philippians 4:6-9; Colossians 3:1-3; I Peter 5:6-7).
- We are citizens of heaven, so we should live as faithful representatives of God's heavenly kingdom and as ambassadors for Christ (I Thessalonians 2:10-12; II Corinthians 5:20).

More Exhortations About Our Walk

There are many more exhortations in Scripture regarding our daily walk for God that do not contain the word *walk*. Such exhortations include fighting the good fight of faith (mentioned in Chapter 5), being humble (addressed in Chapter 6), being of the same mind with fellow brethren (the topic of Chapter 9), and being subject to our governing authorities (covered in Chapter 10). Here are some more of them that we should take to heart and endeavor to follow. If you read Paul's letters, you are sure to find even more exhortations and examples of how we—members of the body of Christ—should conduct our lives as children of God.

Be Thankful

In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:18)

We are exhorted to be thankful for all things (Ephesians 5:20). It is easy to be thankful when things are fine, although many of us tend to take pride in our good fortunes and forget to be thankful. It is not so easy to be thankful when things are not going well. We must remember that God causes all things to work together for good for His children and be thankful even if we do not understand what He is doing (Romans 8:28).

God is almighty and sovereign, and He is loving, forgiving, and gracious. We should remember to thank Him for who He is (Psalm 92:1-4; 103:19-22; I Timothy 1:17), for what He has done for us through Christ (I Corinthians 1:4; 15:57; II Corinthians 9:15; Colossians 1:12), and for what He is doing through us (II Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 1:15-17; I Thessalonians 2:13).

> **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him** [*God*] **be the glory forever. Amen.** (Romans 11:33-36)

Let the peace of Christ [God] **rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Colossians 3:15-17)

We are to pray to God with thanksgiving, realizing that all things are from Him (Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 5:20). If we cease worrying about our circumstances and take all our concerns to God in prayer with thanksgiving, we are promised the peace of God that comes with the full understanding that He is working all things out according to His will and good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13; Romans 8:26-28). Additionally, we should thank God for our fellow believers and for what God is doing for and through them (Romans 1:8; Philippians 1:3-6; II Thessalonians 1:3-4; 2:13-15; Philemon 1:4-7).

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

For this reason I [*Paul*] **too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints** [*believers*]**, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.** (Ephesians 1:15-17)

Yield Ourselves to God

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present [yield] **yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.** (Romans 6:11-13)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only one to walk this earth without sin. Thankfully for us, He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5:21). Brethren, sin is a fact of life. Everyone has inherited a sinful nature (Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 23)—the Bible refers to it as the *natural man* (I Corinthians 2:14)—and even in this dispensation of grace we do not lose that old nature when we are saved (Romans 7:14-25). However, upon belief of the gospel of salvation we gain a new nature—the perfect nature of Christ because He is in us and we are in Him (Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:27). Therefore, we have two opposite natures working against each other within us.

Believers not only have the capacity to sin but continue to do so throughout life on earth. However, because of the power of God and the nature of Christ within us, we have the ability to choose not to let sin rule our lives (Romans 6:19). Due to our weakness, unfortunately, we tend to forget to reckon ourselves dead to sin and continue to expose ourselves to sin and reap its consequences (Galatians 6:7-8). We know it to be true that bad company corrupts good morals (I Corinthians 15:33-34; Proverbs 13:20), yet some of us are drawn to, or even crave, bad company.

Yielding ourselves to God requires a conscious effort on our part to continually examine our associations, actions, and thoughts. We are exhorted to abhor evil things and avoid even the appearance of evil (Romans 12:9; I Thessalonians 5:21-22) and be sober minded or sensible (I Thessalonians 5:4-8; Titus 2:6; Ephesians 5:17-18). Additionally, we are to set our minds on things above, where Christ is, and think pure thoughts

(Philippians 4:8). Our desire and efforts should be to pursue righteousness (I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 2:22) and do all things for God through Christ rather than for ourselves or men (Colossians 3:17, 23).

> **Therefore if** [*because*] **you** [*brethren*] **have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** (Colossians 3:1-3)

Be a Living Sacrifice Sanctified to God

> **Therefore I** [*Paul*] **urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable** [*well-pleasing*] **to God, which is your spiritual service of worship** [reasonable service]**. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** (Romans 12:1-2)

In the first eight chapters of Romans we learn that, among other things, all people are lost in sin and do not even seek after God (Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18); Christ died for our sins (Romans 3:21-26); we are saved by grace through faith apart from works (Romans 4:4-5); we were enemies of God but now have peace with Him (Romans 5:6-11); Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are our spiritual death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11); we have received the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:22-23); we continue to sin because of our old nature but are not condemned by God because we are in Christ (Romans 7:14 – 8:4); God has adopted us as His own children (Romans 8:14-17); and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:28-39). Because of all this, we are now strongly urged to live our lives set apart to God because it is the reasonable, and right, thing to do.

We are in the world, but we are not of it (I Corinthians 2:12; Philippians 3:20). God has sanctified us—set us apart as sacred—to Himself for His purpose (I Corinthians 6:11), and He wants us to live sanctified lives (II Timothy 2:21). Christ was crucified for our sins and was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). His death was our death, and His resurrection was our resurrection; therefore, we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ (Romans 6:8-11). Our desire should be to say with Paul (as he admonished Peter for his hypocrisy—Galatians 2:11-21):

> **"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in** [the faith of] **the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."** (Galatians 2:20)

Is it easy to be a living sacrifice, sanctified unto God? Can we expect to fit in and be accepted by the world and still be pleasing to God? It is not natural to live for Christ in this evil world. Think about what the world finds acceptable. Are the things of the world pleasing to God? We must think about what we do and say and with whom we fellowship and ask ourselves if it is honoring to God. As Christ suffered because He lived according to truth and righteousness, we will suffer if we live for Him (Philippians 1:29-30; II Timothy 3:12). However, if we continue to live as we did before we were saved (or, as if we were not saved), we will be living contrary to what God desires for us, suffer the loss of fellowship with Him, and be miserable. That is, we will be less apt to recognize how God is working in us and, therefore, we will not experience His peace.

> **But you** [*brethren*] **did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted** [is corrupt] **in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you**

be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:20-24)

Be Above Reproach

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world. (Philippians 2:14-15)

As children of God, we are ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). As such, although we are in the world, we are not of it—our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). How do we represent Christ and how are we viewed by the nonbelieving world around us? Do we live and behave like the world, or do we try to live by a higher standard?

To grumble or complain about our circumstances implies we do not really believe that God is in control or is accomplishing His will through us (Philippians 2:13). Paul learned to be content regardless of his circumstances, which is a good example for us (Philippians 4:11-13). We should evaluate our behavior—are we more likely to complain about something or be content?

Disputing with our fellow brethren, or anyone for that matter, is a symptom of pride and arrogance, and leads to disunity (I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:14). We are exhorted to humble ourselves by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose (Philippians 2:1-8). It is better to hold our tongue than to try to get in the last word to prove our point. It is better to speak with grace and with words that are edifying, and to let the Holy Spirit open the hearers' ears to the truth (Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 4:29).

It is unlikely that believers have any influence on the behavior of this world, or their country, state, or city. However, we do have an influence on those with whom we come into contact everyday—family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, supervisors, teachers, etc. These people who are familiar with us are watching us. Unfortunately, many of us tend to mix in so well with the world that we do not appear to be any different. Although some believers put on an appearance of godliness, the people who know them often see them as hypocrites. Do we discredit anyone, boast of our accomplishments or possessions, cast blame on others, lie, steal, cheat, gamble away time or money, participate in worldly (sinful) festivities, or participate in any other activities that are dishonoring to God and our Lord Jesus Christ?

As explained earlier, we are lights of the world, or beacons of truth, and should avoid the deeds of the world, which are considered by God to be darkness (Ephesians 5:6-13; Romans 13:12-14; II Corinthians 6:14; Colossians 1:12-13; I Thessalonians 5:4-5). We should not give nonbelievers cause to blaspheme God because of our sinfulness (Romans 2:24).

For our proud confidence [rejoicing] **is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.** (II Corinthians 1:12)

Speak with Grace

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:6)

Does it matter how we talk to our family, friends, coworkers, or strangers? Does a quick answer with strong or harsh words accomplish the same purpose as a thoughtful and gentle answer? When we are trying

to get a point across, does the manner of our speech have anything to do with how the other person receives it? How do we speak about others?

The Bible has much to say about how we talk to and about each other. What we say and how we say it usually comes from the heart, and our natural heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). By our very nature, then, it is easy to tear people down with our words. Words cannot be taken back; those things spoken in judgment or anger are often remembered forever by the recipient. Therefore, we must draw our strength from God and His Spirit and be careful about what we say and how we say it.

Most of us (including myself) must admit that we have said something to someone or about someone that we regret. Sometimes we intentionally speak words unfit for ambassadors of Christ, or speak in a manner that incites anger, jealously, or pain in the listener. More often, though, we are not even aware of what we are saying or the consequences of our words. Therefore, we are exhorted to speak to each other with grace, as though our words were seasoned with salt. Most people add salt to food to make it taste better—the food is more palatable and enjoyable. Likewise, we should speak in a manner that is palatable and makes the situation better.

> **Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.** (Ephesians 4:29)

In the book of James, the brethren were exhorted to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19-20). Do we really listen to the person talking to us, including one who may be trying to admonish us with good reason, and respond wisely and with grace? The book of Proverbs, also, has many references about how we ought to speak to each other (e.g., Proverbs 15:1-4; 16:21; 17:4; 19:1, 21:23; 26:28).

> **He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, but he who ignores reproof goes astray. He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool. When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, the heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of understanding.** (Proverbs 10:17-21)

Speak the Truth

> **Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.** (Ephesians 4:25)

We are to speak the truth with each other and in such a way that we are an example to other believers and above reproach by anybody (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8). We are to avoid filthy speech, dirty or abusive jokes, or slandering of others (Ephesians 4:31; 5:4; Colossians 3:8-9; I Peter 3:8-10). Should we laugh at or tell the *funny* joke that is crude or derogatory? Should we curse the weather or the inconsiderate driver? Should we speak untruthfully of those in authority? No. Instead, we must be careful to avoid or stop practicing such things and desire to speak the truth with grace.

In speaking the truth with one another, there are times when we must admonish or correct each other. Speaking the truth of God and His word sometimes requires a strong position that is not well received by the hearer. Whereas Christ continually taught and corrected His disciples with grace, He (as well as John the Baptist) called the spiritual leaders—Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes—snakes because of how they abused God's word and misled the people of Israel (Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:29-33). Paul's letters are full of instructions on how we should live and serve God, but he called the Corinthian believers carnal babes and the Galatian believers foolish because they were misusing their knowledge and liberty in Christ (I Corinthians

3:1-3; Galatians 3:1-3). He also had harsh words about some people who caused harm to himself and other brethren because of their opposition to sound doctrine—the truth of God (I Timothy 1:18-20; II Timothy 4:14-15).

We must be careful, however, how we admonish others because we are not the Son of God nor are we His apostles—we have not been given authority by God to judge others in condemnation (Romans 14:10-13). God gave Christ the authority to judge others in His stead (John 5:21-29; Acts 10:42), and Christ gave His apostles the authority to judge those who rejected their message and witness (Matthew 10:14-15; John 20:21-23; Acts 13:44-51). Besides Apostle Paul and perhaps only his coworker Barnabas (who was considered to be an apostle, also, because he may have been a witness of Jesus' ministry and was specifically set apart by the Holy Spirit to minister with Paul—Acts 4:36; 13:2, 46; 14:4, 14), believers in this dispensation of grace do not have that authority. Our condemnation of others for their words or actions is often a reflection of, or deflection from, our own behavior; that is, we are judging them for the things we are guilty of saying or doing (Matthew 7:1-5).

It is true, however, that all Scripture is inspired by God and is to be used for doctrine (teaching), reproof, correction, and instruction (training) in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16-17). We are to exercise a form of judgment, or discernment, between right and wrong among our fellow believers for reproof and correction (Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:1-6; II Thessalonians 3:14-15). If we find that we must admonish others, it should be done with all wisdom (by using the word of God correctly) and grace (Colossians 3:16). We never know when God may grant the other person a change of heart.

> **We urge you, brethren, admonish** [warn] **the unruly** [*undisciplined*]**, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another** [*fellow brethren*] **and for all people.** (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

> **The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.** (II Timothy 2:24-26)

To elaborate a bit further on speaking with grace and the truth with one another, there are times when it is better to leave things unsaid. We need to consider our motives when it comes to admonishing others. Will saying what we know or believe to be true about a particular situation or what another person is doing help or make things worse? Are we genuinely trying to help, or are we exercising a form of self-righteousness? Are we intentionally, or unintentionally, wielding some sort of power over the other person, thus making that person feel inadequate or subservient to us? Are we being hypocritical in our judgment? Depending on the situation, perhaps it is better to make our point through our own actions—by being a good example—than through words. We need to remember to love our neighbor as ourself and exhibit humility and grace.

> **He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.** (Proverbs 12:17-19)

Do All Things for the Lord

> **Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Colossians 3:17)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. (Colossians 3:23)

It does not matter *what* we do in life nearly as much as it matters *how* we do what we do. For example, a pastor may be the leader of a large and active church, but is he serving himself or the Lord (Philippians 1:15-17)? Is he even teaching the truth (II Timothy 4:1-4)? We must examine what we do and how and why we do it. Are we seeking riches and fame, or perhaps trying to prove that we are better than others or to leave a legacy? Is our service to ourselves or to someone or something else, or do we want to please God?

For am I [*Paul*] **now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.** (Galatians 1:10)

It is not easy to do all things for the Lord. In fact, because of our old sin nature, no one has ever done all things for the Lord. Our old nature is sinful, powerful, and self-serving. It craves attention, admiration, and glory. As long as we walk on this earth, our new nature in Christ will be in constant battle with the old and, unfortunately, our sin nature will win its share of the battles. Thankfully, however, our new nature is greater and, by the grace of God, there is no condemnation because we are in Christ (Romans 7:14 – 8:1).

To do all things for the Lord means we need to do the right things and with the right motives. As believers, we have choices to make every day between right and wrong. Are we going to serve our sinful desires or are we going to serve God (Romans 6:8-14)?

We cannot depend on our own knowledge to do the right thing in the eyes of God. God does not want us to do what *seems* right, but what *is* right. It is our nature to do what is right in our own eyes, but for the nonbeliever the natural consequence is spiritual death (Proverbs 14:12; 21:2). We must rely on Scripture, rightly divided, to know and do the right thing (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17). Of course, there are consequences for doing the right thing that many believers fear: suffering and persecution (Philippians 1:29; II Timothy 3:12). However, to suffer for doing what is right in the name of our Lord is a blessing (Matthew 5:11; Romans 5:3-5). Is it not far better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong?

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. (I Peter 3:17)

What is our motivation to do the right things? Are we seeking rewards or treasure in heaven? By our works, do we hope to be in a better position in heaven than fellow brethren who are not as diligent as we are? Is not this attitude a form of selfish ambition? Would it not be far better to do the right thing, for the Lord, because it is the right thing to do? Do we need any more motivation to serve God than to remember what He has done for us through Christ and be thankful? I will address this further in Chapter 11.

Stand Fast in Our Freedom

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law [*of Moses*] **through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh** [*not saved*]**, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter** [*the Law*]**.** (Romans 7:4-6)

I addressed standing fast, or firm, in the faith in the context of loving our neighbors in Chapter 5. How does *standing* for something have to do with our *walk*. In the context of this study, our stand is a part of our daily conduct. It is the opposite of retreating from what we have in Christ or surrendering to sinful influences. I would like to present an aspect of standing fast that might not be widely understood but that definitely relates to our walk.

Brethren, it was for our freedom, or liberty, that Christ died for us. Freedom from what or for what? When we think of freedom today, we often think in terms of political freedom and living in a free country. Many of us, it seems, try to do everything in our power to stay free. However, this is not the kind of freedom that Paul was referring to. Our freedom does not depend on our circumstances, but on what we have in Christ and what He did for us at the cross.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul was chastising them for trying to serve God by subjecting themselves to the Law of Moses. Because they knew better through his teaching, Paul called them foolish for trying to live according to the works of the Law instead of living by faith (Galatians 3:1-5). Brethren, we are no longer under the Law but under the grace of God (Romans 6:14). Because it is perfect, the consequence of disobeying the Law is death (II Corinthians 3:4-6). Thankfully, through Christ's death for us the Law was taken away. Therefore, we are free from the slavery, or bondage, of the Law and should no longer subject ourselves to it. However, are we subjecting ourselves to the Law anyway? I address this question in greater depth in Chapters 12 and 14, but I will summarize several points in the following paragraphs.

Like the Galatian believers, many brethren today are trying to live according to at least parts of the Law and believe they are glorifying God in doing so. Specific issues addressed by Paul concerning the Galatians included subjecting themselves to circumcision and observing certain days, months, seasons, and years for spiritual purposes. Are believers doing any of these or similar works of righteousness today?

Baptism, covered more fully in Chapter 14, is to believers today what circumcision was to the Galatians. Most Christian denominations require or incorporate some form of water baptism as a tenet of their faith. Brethren, water baptism was an act that, when following repentance of sins and done so in faith, resulted in the remission of sins (Matthew 3:2, 6; Acts 2:38). However, in this dispensation of grace, water baptism is not a means of remitting our sins nor is it required by God or even desired by Him (I Corinthians 1:17). There is one baptism today, and it is a spiritual baptism that places us into the body of Christ by faith (Romans 6:3; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6). To preach or submit to water baptism today is putting ourselves back under the Law.

How many believers think that we should obey the Ten Commandments? It appears that many do. The commandments described in Exodus 20 were the first part of the overall Law of Moses. Strict obedience was required by God and if the people of Israel had actually obeyed them, then they would have enforced the specific consequences (including death) detailed by God. Why, then, would we want to put ourselves under the Law? Furthermore, why should we want the Ten Commandments displayed in public places (or anywhere else) and try to impose them and their consequences upon the nonbelieving world?

Many brethren consider the sabbath day as holy; and some try to abide by at least some of the restrictions associated with that day as detailed in the Law of Moses. This effort is in vain because there is no sabbath day in this dispensation. Nor are there any other holy days, months, seasons, or years (Galatians 4:9-11). This includes Christmas and Easter and other holidays considered sacred by many brethren. There is nothing in Scripture that indicates we should observe a day commemorating the birth of our Lord, nor is a day set aside in Scripture to observe His death for us. Yes, Christ was born as a human and we should be very thankful for that. And yes, Christ died for our sins, which is the very foundation of our salvation, but we should be mindful

and thankful for this every day of the year. We know these things happened by faith; however, to observe them as special days for the sake of worship are works of righteousness and are contrary to God's will for us.

The church today is bogged down in doctrine and practice that is a mixture of Law, tradition, and grace. Just as Israel's spiritual leaders had nullified the Law by changing it or adding to it (Matthew 15:1-9; 23:1-33), the church today has nullified the grace of God by developing countless sets of rules and new doctrines. Brethren, Christ died for us so that we could be free from the bondage—and curse—of the Law.

Another very important aspect of our freedom in Christ is our freedom from the bondage of sin. We are not to turn our freedom from the curse of the Law into an opportunity for the flesh; instead, we should use our freedom to serve each other in love (Galatians 5:13-15). Although we are not to try to obey the Law of Moses, the perfection of the Law is summarized by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Furthermore, we should not live according to the sinful desires and works of the flesh but should walk by and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). Through faith in Christ's death for our sins, we have victory over the power of sin and should no longer subject ourselves to it (I Corinthians 15:55-58; Romans 6:1-23).

Pray Without Ceasing

> **Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.** (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Perhaps prayer falls more appropriately under the heading of worship, because it is through prayer that we communicate directly with our Almighty God—our Creator. I look at the role of prayer as part of our worship in Appendix B. However, I believe that prayer is also an important part of our daily walk because it should be an expression of both our humility and our love, which are central to a worthy walk.

I am afraid that what we believe is the purpose of prayer, and the way we pray, often demonstrates our misunderstanding or misuse of prayer. I will address this statement in Chapter 14. My personal experience regarding a misunderstanding of prayer led to a life-changing transformation that I describe in the article **Testimony of Grace** that is listed in Appendix A.

But what does it mean to pray without ceasing as commanded by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonian brethren? Are we to pray all the time? There are disciples of some religions that spend most of their waking hours in prayer to their god or gods, but we have no examples of anyone in the Bible praying all the time. I was taught that praying without ceasing must mean that we should always have an *attitude of prayer* regardless of what we are doing. I recall believing this explanation at first but, at some point, practicalities set in. Many of the things we do require our full attention and cannot be done while having an attitude of prayer that requires our full attention to God (Colossians 4:2). What else could it mean?

Think about something that is important to you, such as a person you know who needs salvation, someone who is going through personal difficulties, an existing or upcoming situation that is weighing on your mind, etc. If it is something important, we usually think about it often, or at least we should think about it often. God wants us to be humble and unselfish concerning the people around us and be attentive to their needs (Philippians 2:3-4; Galatians 6:2). God wants us to pray to Him about them and their needs, as well as our own needs and concerns (Philippians 4:6). He wants us to do so with sincerity and devotion and with thanksgiving. We should not give up on prayer or stop praying when things are not turning out as hoped. Instead of ceasing, we should continue in prayer because this is God's will for us.

> **Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent**

in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints [*believers*]**, practicing hospitality.** (Romans 12:9-13)

Do Not Lose Heart in Doing Good

Let us not lose heart in doing good [well doing—*doing what is right*]**, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith** [*fellow believers*]**.** (Galatians 6:9-10)

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good [well doing—*doing what is right*]**.** (II Thessalonians 3:13)

Earlier in this chapter we looked at the command to walk in good works or deeds for our fellow brethren and nonbelievers—even for our enemies. It can be very satisfying to demonstrate our kindness to others by doing good things for them. To close out this chapter, there is another perspective of doing good that is addressed in Scripture that I want to focus on here. It is about continuing to do the right thing despite how hard it is to do so.

Please note the added words in the brackets following the NASB words "doing good" in Galatians 6:9 and II Thessalonians 3:13. My phrase *doing what is right* is another way of saying "well doing" in the KJV and is equivalent to "doing right" as translated from the Greek text in the *The Amplified Bible*. Doing good in this context, therefore, has to do with obeying God's commands to us and thinking and acting in such a way that is pleasing to Him.

We have looked at many of the commands and exhortations regarding a worthy walk. Is it easy to do all these things as part of our daily conduct in Christ as the children of God? No. Not only do we live in a sinful world, but all believers continue to sin, including being sinful to each other. In this chapter I have described the need to do the right thing as members of the body of Christ regarding patience, goodness, self-control, walking honestly, and doing all things for the Lord (which covers all aspects of our walk). Doing good for and to others depends on us sincerely endeavoring to do the right thing by them. Doing what is right leaves no room for deceitful thoughts, words, or actions. Furthermore, it can only be done if it is in accordance with the proper and truthful use of Scripture (II Timothy 2:15) and through the strength of God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:14-19; Colossians 1:9-12).

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame [hidden things of dishonesty]**, not walking in craftiness or adulterating** [*handling dishonestly*] **the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth** [*plainly telling the truth*] **commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.** (II Corinthians 4:1-2)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort [*encouragement*] **and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.** (II Thessalonians 2:16-17)

Paul encouraged his fellow brethren to not grow weary in doing good—doing what is right without weakening. Why might we grow weary or disheartened for doing what is right? If anyone could be forgiven for being weary, it would have been Paul. He was followed in his journeys by false believers who not only tried to convince those he was teaching that his message was false, but some were trying to kill him (Acts 9:23-25; 14:19; 23:12-15; II Corinthians 11:23-26). Despite teaching them the truth of God's grace during three different visits, the Galatian believers did succumb to false teaching and Paul wondered if he had ministered

to them in vain (Galatians 3:1-3; 4:8-11). In his two letters to the Corinthian brethren, Paul had to remind them several times of his qualifications as an apostle of Jesus Christ to counter their own pride and jealousy (e.g., I Corinthians 4:1-21; II Corinthians 10:1-18). Even his former coworkers in Asia turned away from him (II Timothy 1:15). And yet Paul continued to teach and stand for the truth of God's word until he was put to death (Philippians 1:21-26; II Timothy 4:6-8). Are we doing the right thing in both word and deed regardless of how others view or treat us? We will look more into Paul's example of a worthy walk in the next chapter and the consequences of doing the right thing in Chapter 12.

> **Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man** [*our physical body*] **is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.** (II Corinthians 4:16-18)

> **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.** (I Corinthians 15:58)

Our Challenge

Has God told us how He expects to live each day as His children? I sincerely believe so and hope that you do, too. Perhaps all the scriptural exhortations presented in this chapter, as well as the previous two chapters, could be incorporated under the general heading of *Walk in Christ by the Holy Spirit*. If we heed these exhortations and endeavor to do them, then we would be walking worthy of—as befitting—our salvation in Christ. I am aware of many of my shortcomings, and others who know me are likely aware of more of them, but this is my desire.

There are even more exhortations and instructions regarding our daily walk provided in Paul's letters. Most are included in the references already provided in this chapter but have not been addressed under their own headings. By no means will I cover all the exhortations in Paul's letters regarding our walk as believers—I leave it to you to search the Scriptures. For now, however, in addition to the headings in this chapter, we should think and do the following:

- Forgive others (Ephesians 4:32).
- Set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:2).
- Think on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and are of good repute (Philippians 4:8).
- Teach one another (Colossians 3:16).
- Encourage the fainthearted and help the weak (I Thessalonians 5:14).
- Be of the same mind with fellow brethren (Philippians 2:1-2).
- Glorify God in our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19-20).
- Be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20-21).
- Be sanctified (I Thessalonians 4:3-8).
- Be mature (I Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:14-16).
- Subject ourselves to our governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1).
- Stand firm in the faith (I Corinthians 16:13).
- Fight the good fight of faith (I Timothy 1:18-19; 6:12).

Some of these exhortations have been briefly addressed in this chapter and in the previous chapters, and some we will explore in the next chapters. There will be some overlap of what has already been covered because of how everything is connected, but sometimes from a different perspective including how we should *not* walk. We will also consider some consequences that we can expect if we sincerely try to walk worthy of our salvation to which we were called by the grace of God.

Chapter 8

Our Example to Follow

Brethren, join in following my [*Paul's*] **example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.** (Philippians 3:17-19)

Be imitators [followers] **of me** [*Paul*]**, just as I also am of Christ.** (I Corinthians 11:1)

Who Should We Follow?

I was taught to follow Jesus—to be His disciple. *Discipleship* was emphasized in the denominational churches in which I was a member, and the instructions for being a good disciple were drawn primarily from the gospel accounts—the books of Matthew through John. As a man, Jesus exemplified love and humility, which Paul emphasized throughout his letters as shown in Chapters 5 and 6. However, although there are principles of Jesus' teaching and character that we can pattern our walk after (that are also included in Paul's letters), there are many commands and features of His ministry that we cannot, and are not to, follow. How can this be the case?

Apostle Paul exhorted the brethren—fellow members of the body of Christ—to imitate or follow him *as he followed Christ*; we are to walk according to his example. Not only was he saying *do as I say* but also *do as I do*. This is viewed by some brethren to be an arrogant statement. It is even considered by some to be blasphemous, because we all *know* (i.e., we have been taught) that we are to follow Jesus to be good disciples. But was Paul being arrogant and blasphemous? No, he most certainly was not. Please carefully consider Scripture as we explore the meaning behind Paul's exhortation.

So, how are we supposed to follow Christ as Paul did? Before answering this question, we must be careful to remember some very important truths about Jesus when He was on earth in the humble form of a man (Philippians 2:5-8). As God in the flesh (John 1:1-2, 14), Jesus was perfect and righteous (II Corinthians 5:21)—no believer can claim to be perfect. He was born as a Jew of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people at that time, but actually came *only* to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6; John 1:11). In other words, Israel as a nation was self-righteous and in effect did not need God. Jesus came to minister to Jews who were not blinded by their own righteousness. Furthermore, He only ministered to the Jews in Judea, which encompassed Jerusalem and the cities of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

But He [*Jesus*] **answered and said, "I was sent** [*by God*] **only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** (Matthew 15:24)

Jesus was born under the Law of Moses and instructed His disciples to obey it (Galatians 4:4-5; Luke 2:21-24; Matthew 19:16-19; 23:1-3). As demonstrated earlier, the Law was a curse to us because no one could keep it (it was righteous and we are not) so God took it out of our way by figuratively nailing it to the cross with Christ (Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14). Furthermore, prior to His crucifixion Jesus commanded His disciples to limit their ministry only to the people of Judea; they were not to even go to the Samaritans (Jews of the remaining tribes of Israel) or to the Gentiles (everyone who was not a Jew).

These twelve [*disciples*] **Jesus sent out after instructing** [*commanding*] **them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the**

house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' " (Matthew 10:5-7)

Following His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom to all nations but in the following specific and necessary order: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then the Gentile nations (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19-20). This was in accordance with prophecy because the nations were to be blessed after Israel is redeemed and Christ establishes His kingdom on earth (Acts 3:18-26; Isaiah 60:1-3; Zechariah 8:7-13). For Israel to be redeemed (a repentant and forgiven nation that serves only God), God's designated capital of Israel, Jerusalem (in Judea), had to turn to God, followed by the rest of Judea, followed by Samaria (the rest of historical Israel).[1] Only then were the disciples to expand their ministry to the Gentiles in the surrounding nations. However, the record in the book of Acts shows that not even Jerusalem repented, as was demonstrated by Israel's religious leaders who imprisoned Peter and others and stoned Stephen to death for speaking the truth (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 6:8 – 7:60).

Jesus instructed His disciples to preach the gospel (good news) of the kingdom, which was the same gospel preached by John the Baptist prior to Jesus' ministry and the gospel He Himself preached (Matthew 3:1-3; 4:23; 9:35; 10:7; Mark 1:14-15). What many Christians do not realize is that this kingdom was the long-prophesied kingdom of heaven on earth that Israel had been waiting for (Acts 1:6) as covered in Chapter 4. This kingdom, which would be ruled by the Messiah (*the* Christ—Daniel 9:24-25; Isaiah 9:6-7; Ezekiel 37:15-28; Jeremiah 33:14-15; Micah 5:2; Matthew 16:13-20; John 4:25-29; Acts 3:18-21), was finally *at hand*. That is, its establishment was imminent in accordance with Old Testament prophecies.

Individual salvation was based on repentance of sins followed by water baptism for the remission of sins (faith—believing that God would forgive their sins, plus works—physically submitting to water baptism as a demonstration of faith). This requirement of the gospel of the kingdom was first implemented by God through John the Baptist and was still the method of salvation at Pentecost, after Christ's resurrection (Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:4-5; 16:15-16; Acts 2:36-38).

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness [remission] **of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38)

To prove to the nation of Israel that this gospel of the kingdom was in accordance with the will of God, the disciples were given the ability to perform miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only would miraculous signs be a testament of their ministry, but Jesus also commanded His disciples to perform them. These miracles included speaking in tongues, casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead (Matthew 10:8; Mark 16:15-20). Despite wanting to see and witnessing these miraculous signs (John 4:48; I Corinthians 1:22-24), however, the people continued to reject God. Please recall what Peter told the people at Pentecost:

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." (Acts 2:22-23)

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[1] The original nation of Israel was split into two kingdoms after Solomon's reign (I Kings 11:9-13; 31-35; 12:16-20). One kingdom was referred to as *Judah* (with Jerusalem as its capital), and the other as both *Israel* and *Samaria* (with the city of Samaria as its capital—I Kings 16:29) in the Old Testament. The people of Judah (referred to as *Judea*, *Israel*, and *Jews* in the New Testament) were not to associate with Samaritans, which still held true during Jesus' ministry (I Kings 12:19; Matthew 10:5; John 4:9).

Brethren, please compare these things about the ministry of Jesus the man to the things we learn from Paul's letters as presented in the opening chapters of this book—those things that were revealed to him by our risen, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

- Jesus, as well as John the Baptist and His disciples, preached the gospel (good news) of the imminence of Israel's long-promised heavenly kingdom on earth. Paul never preached the imminence of Israel's kingdom or that we would be part of it; instead, he preached the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24; Ephesians 3:1-3; II Corinthians 4:13-15; Colossians 1:3-8).
- We are not saved by repenting of our sins and being water baptized for the remission of sins. Instead, we are saved by believing the good news that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14). Salvation is by the grace of God through faith apart from any works of righteousness, including water baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:4-5).
- We are not to offer the gospel of salvation to the people of Israel only, or to them first, for them to be saved first; Israel and its promises have been set aside by God during this dispensation of grace (Romans 11:25-29; II Corinthians 3:12-16). Instead, there is no difference between Jew, Gentile, male, female, slave, or free person, and all who believe the gospel of salvation are members of the body of Christ and have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27: Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 1:3-8).
- Our hope is not an earthly kingdom with Christ as King, but a heavenly hope. At the moment of salvation, we are in Christ at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:1-4).
- We do not have the promise of being able to speak in tongues, cast out demons, heal the sick, or raise the dead, nor are we commanded to perform them. These miraculous gifts of the power of the Holy Spirit applied to the ministry concerning Israel but passed away sometime during Paul's ministry when God fully set Israel and its promises aside. Therefore, no one today has *any* gift of the Holy Spirit, including the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, regardless of what they claim or believe (I Corinthians 13:8-13; Philippians 2:25-27; II Timothy 4:20; I Timothy 5:23).
- Jesus commanded His disciples to continue to obey the Law of Moses. However, we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses because God has taken it out of our way—we are not to even try to obey any of it (Romans 3:21-28; 6:14; 7:4-6; Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14).

These are just some of the important differences between the ministries and messages of Jesus (and His disciples) and Paul. What changed? Why are we not to walk as Jesus walked, in obedience to all His commands? Please consider the following passage in the context of the opening chapters of this book. Are we to *know* and obey our Lord as Jesus the man who ministered to Israel in accordance with prophecy, or as our Lord Jesus Christ—the resurrected, ascended, and glorified Savior—who is our mediator and advocate at the right hand of God and head of the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:4-10; Philippians 2:5-11; I Timothy 2:5-6)?

> **For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live** [*i.e., believers—Ephesians 2:4-7*] **might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh** [*i.e., Jesus the man*]**, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.** (II Corinthians 5:14-16)

We certainly know Christ according to the flesh because we have the record of His birth, ministry to His people, death, and resurrection, as well as His instructions to His disciples during His ministry and before

ascending into His rightful and glorified position at the right hand of God. All of this was in fulfillment of prophecy. The above passage, however, says that Jesus *the man* is not to be our focus because His earthly works and message were directed to the people and nation of Israel and its future. Through Paul's letters, on the other hand, we learn what Christ accomplished for us at the cross and all that we inherit because of His righteous work. We are to set our minds on things above where Christ is.

> **Therefore if** [*because*] **you** [*brethren*] **have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.** (Colossians 3:1-4)

Why Should We Follow Paul's Example?

A pastor told the congregation of a church of which I was a member to be wary of Paul's epistles (letters—Romans through Philemon) because he was an arrogant man. Our focus, he said, should be on the rest of the Bible. I do not recall that he explained his reasoning, but I found in subsequent years that he was not alone in this teaching. I perceived that the arrogance attributed to Paul was based, at least in part, on him saying that he was the apostle of the Gentiles, referring to his message as *my gospel*, and exhorting believers to follow him. Should we avoid Paul's letters because he said these things?

Please recall Chapter 4 where it is explained that we must use the word of God accurately. It needs to be rightly divided to understand what is being taught to whom so that we can believe and obey God as He intended. I am convinced that the most important division of the Bible is between prophecy and the mystery. Prophecy is that which was spoken since the world began and is centered on the Law of Moses and God's plan for the nation of Israel and its future heavenly kingdom on earth. The mystery, on the other hand, is God's heavenly plan for members of the body of Christ—it was hidden in God since before the world began until revealed to us through Paul by revelations of our Lord Jesus Christ. The mystery is centered on the gospel of the grace of God where He is dealing with Jews and Gentiles without distinction and is based on the complete work that Christ accomplished at the cross.

As a reminder, let us briefly recall from Chapter 4 what Scripture says about Paul. Who was he and by what authority did he say that we should follow his example in our daily walk?

Saul the Pharisee

Before Paul was known by his Greek name, he was a Jewish Pharisee named Saul trained by the respected Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). He was considered by his peers to be a Hebrew among Hebrews and blameless according to the Law of Moses—a religious leader among the people of Israel (Philippians 3:4-6; Acts 26:4-5). Jesus, however, did not mince words when describing the sinfulness and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the other religious leaders of His day (scribes, Sadducees, and chief priests—Matthew 16:1-12, 21; 20:17-19; 23:1-33). Saul the Pharisee became the leading enemy of God—the chief of sinners—by trying to destroy *the Way* that consisted of all the followers (disciples) of Jesus (Acts 8:1-3; 22:3-5; 26:9-11).

> **For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism** [the Jews' religion]**, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.** (Galatians 1:13-14)

> **It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost** [chief] **of all.** (I Timothy 1:15)

In the name of God, Saul led the rebellion against God and our Lord Jesus Christ with the full approval of the spiritual leaders of Israel (Acts 9:1-2, 13-14; 22:4-5). The leaders believed that Jesus was blasphemous for declaring Himself to be the Son of God and Israel's promised Messiah (Matthew 26:59-68; John 19:1-7), and they wanted to end the movement started by Him. Saul was up to the task.

Paul's Apostleship

Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 22:3), the chief of sinners who led the rebellion against God by persecuting our Lord Jesus Christ, was saved by the grace of God. His salvation occurred during a miraculous event when our glorified Lord appeared to him while he was on his way to Damascus to seek and bind disciples for judgment in Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:4-18). God had a plan for him that was developed before he was born; more correctly, it was a plan that God formed before the foundation of the earth (Ephesians 1:3-6; Romans 16:25-27). Brethren, it should be humbling to realize that God can save anyone by His grace—we should not prejudge anyone regarding sharing the gospel of salvation.

> **As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."** (Acts 9:3-6)

> **But when God, who had set me** [*Paul*] **apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.** (Galatians 1:15-17)

Sometime afterward he became known as Paul (Acts 13:9). Contrary to the other apostles, Paul did not walk with Jesus during His ministry nor was he a witness to His resurrection (Acts 1:21-26). However, our glorified Lord revealed Himself to Paul who became the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16; I Corinthians 15:3-10; Romans 15:14-16; Colossians 1:25-27; I Timothy 2:7). He was chosen as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God apart from any involvement with the other apostles (Acts 9:15-16; Galatians 1:1, 15-17; I Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1-2). Paul defended the authority of his apostleship knowing that he was appointed by God but, at the same time, was humbled by the appointment because he had been God's enemy and had vigorously tried to destroy the followers of Jesus (I Corinthians 15:9; I Timothy 1:12-14).

> **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope.** (I Timothy 1:1)

> **Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God** [*believers*] **and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago** [before the world began]**, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior.** (Titus 1:1-3)

> **But I** [*Paul*] **am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an** [the] **apostle of** [the] **Gentiles, I magnify my ministry** [office]**.** (Romans 11:13)

Brethren, who are we to minimize or disregard Paul's authority as God's appointed apostle—our apostle—in this dispensation of the grace of God?

Paul's Message

Paul explained the mystery that had been kept secret in God since before the world began until He revealed it through Christ to Paul (Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-12; I Corinthians 2:6-8). He taught the gospel of the grace of God, which is part of the revelation of the mystery (Acts 20:24). The first thing that Paul preached to nonbelievers was the gospel of salvation (that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead), which is the basis of the gospel of grace (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11).

> **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship** [dispensation] **of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.** (Ephesians 3:1-3)

Paul did refer to the message he preached as *my gospel* (Romans 2:16; 16:25-27; II Timothy 2:8-9) because it differed from the gospel preached by the other apostles. He did not learn his message from them but received it through revelations directly from our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-17; II Corinthians 12:1-7; Ephesians 3:1-7). Furthermore, his message regarding the mystery and the gospel of grace completed the word of God because it revealed God's eternal purpose that He had kept hidden in Himself (Ephesians 3:8-12; Colossians 1:25-27). Significantly, Paul was the last person to receive any revelations *directly* from Christ. The book of Revelation provides the revelation of Jesus Christ to John *via* the angel of God concerning the last details of the fulfillment of God's prophetic plan for Israel and the nations (Revelation 1:1-2; 22:8-9).

Follow Paul's Example

In the previous chapter we looked at many of Paul's exhortations (commands) about what God expects of us in a walk—our daily conduct—that is befitting our salvation in Christ. The commands are not hypothetical or unattainable. Brethren, they are not simply adages intended to make us feel good yet disregarded as we go about doing our own things in our own way according to our own desires. We should endeavor to do what God revealed to us through His apostle to us.

In the opening passages for this chapter, we have two instances where Paul implores fellow brethren to whom he had ministered to walk according to his example—as he followed Christ. These are not the only occasions when Paul exhorted believers to follow his teaching and conduct. Please note that Paul was not exhorting his fellow brethren to follow him as his disciple; he never told anyone to do this and spoke against it (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-7). The sense of *following* in I Corinthians 11:1 as well as the passages below is that we should imitate Paul—follow his teaching and example—as he imitated Christ.

> **For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators** [followers] **of me.** (I Corinthians 4:15-16)

> **The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:9)

> **Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.** (I Thessalonians 4:1-2)

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in [belief of] **the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.** (II Thessalonians 2:13-15)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a [*financial*] **burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.** (II Thessalonians 3:7-9)

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me [*Paul*]**, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.** (II Timothy 1:13)

You [*Timothy*] **therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.** (II Timothy 2:1-2)

Paul, then, exhorted the brethren (including his coworker Timothy who was like a son to him) to follow his example of a worthy walk. If we imitate or follow Paul as he followed Christ, our lives will be pleasing to God, and we will know the inner peace that comes from God (I Thessalonians 4:1; Philippians 4:6-9). We know what he told believers regarding how to conduct our daily lives, but how did Paul lead his life? Paul's actions and attitude that we should follow or imitate are revealed in his letters and the book of Acts.

Please think about how many of Paul's commands regarding our walk were exemplified by his life in his service to Christ and to believers. For example, he:

- Loved the brethren with whom he ministered and fellowshipped (I Corinthians 16:24; II Corinthians 2:4).
- Was content (he knew the peace of God), regardless of circumstances (Philippians 4:11-12; II Corinthians 12:9-10).
- Depended on God (Philippians 4:13; II Corinthians 12:9-10).
- Rejoiced in his ministry regarding others and shared his joy with them (Philippians 2:17-18; Romans 16:19).
- Was thankful to God (II Corinthians 2:14; 9:15) and thankful for fellow believers (Romans 1:8; 16:1-16; Philippians 1:3).
- Behaved properly toward believers (I Thessalonians 2:10-12).
- Exhibited good conduct toward the world—nonbelievers—and did not give them cause to blaspheme God (II Corinthians 1:12).
- Worked for his own wages so that he would not be a financial burden to others (I Thessalonians 2:9; I Corinthians 9:18).
- Prayed for fellow brethren (Philippians 1:3-5, 9-11; Ephesians 3:14-19; Romans 1:9-12).
- Did the right thing despite the consequences (Acts 20:22-24; II Corinthians 11:23-27).
- Did all things for the Lord and the sake of the gospel rather than for men or to seek their approval (I Corinthians 9:23; Galatians 1:10).
- Showed compassion toward others (Philippians 2:25-28; Romans 9:1-5).
- Was humble (Acts 14:11-15; Ephesians 3:8; Philippians 3:7-8; I Corinthians 2:1-5).

- Conformed himself (i.e., was not superior or offensive) to those to whom he preached (I Corinthians 9:19-23; 10:31-33).
- Was self-disciplined (I Corinthians 9:26-27; Acts 24:16).
- Was eager to serve God (Romans 1:15), was a faithful servant of Christ (I Corinthians 4:1-2), and was unashamed of the word of God (Romans 1:16-17).
- Lived a sanctified life (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:7-11).
- Stood for the truth and did not withhold it from others (Acts 26:24-25; Romans 9:1; I Timothy 2:7).
- Warned fellow believers about false teaching (Philippians 3:18-19; I Timothy 6:20-21; II Timothy 4:1-4).
- Shared the gospel despite his circumstances, such as during his imprisonments (Philippians 1:12-13; Acts 16:25-32).
- Suffered hardship and persecution in his service to Christ (II Corinthians 11:23-29; II Timothy 4:14-15; Acts 14:19; 16:22-24).
- Knew the peace of God, even when he faced his sentence of death (II Timothy 1:12; 4:6-8; Philippians 1:21-24).

Paul, like all of us, was not perfect; however, he practiced what he preached. He was an ambassador for Christ, as are all children of God. If we endeavor to obey Paul's commandments and follow him as he followed Christ, then we, too, will be good ambassadors for Christ, faithfully representing Him in our daily lives.

> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg** [*implore*] **you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He** [*God*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (II Corinthians 5:20-21)

Are We Following Paul?

Should we diminish or ignore Paul's letters in the Bible because some brethren portray him as an arrogant man? I hope I have conclusively shown that such advice or teaching is terribly misguided and wrong. I believe that the principal error of Christianity today is that it does not recognize the importance and distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message. He was given his authority as an apostle by God and his message was received by revelations from our Lord Jesus Christ. His message of the gospel of the grace of God through the revelation of the mystery not only was different than the message of the rest of the Bible (which was directed toward Israel and its future kingdom), but it explains God's eternal purpose and ties the entire Bible together.

> **To me, the very least of all saints** [*believers*]**, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable** [unsearchable] **riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration** [*plan*] **of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold** [*intricate, all-encompassing*] **wisdom of God might now be made known through the church** [*believers—the body of Christ*] **to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He** [*God*] **carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.** (Ephesians 3:8-12)

In Ephesians 3:8 above, I augmented the NASB word *unfathomable* with the word *unsearchable*, which appears in the KJV, the *New International Version*, and the *English Standard Version* Bibles. The revelation of the mystery is truly unfathomable in that God's ways are beyond our comprehension (Romans 11:33-36), but regarding the riches of Christ it contains information about Christ and God's eternal plan that cannot be found in God's prophetic plan. Christ was referred to through veiled references throughout the Old Testament as

demonstrated by the many fulfilled prophecies regarding His birth, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. However, the full ramifications of Christ's work on the cross (the manifold wisdom of God) were not revealed or even hinted at in the Old Testament—they were truly unsearchable (I Corinthians 2:6-8; see also Chapters 2 and 4 as well as Appendix C).

Brethren, are we following Paul's teaching and his example in our walk as believers who are saved by the grace of God? Perhaps one reason that many believers do not understand the significance of Paul's message or heed his many exhortations regarding our walk is that they hold us accountable. Jesus spoke to the people of Israel in parables using veiled language regarding what to expect when Israel's promised kingdom is established on earth. Several of Jesus' parables are recorded in Matthew 13. Their meaning, which He had to explain to His disciples, was reserved for those who walked with Him and believed Him. The rest of the people remained blind to their meaning because of their self-righteousness, which fulfilled prophecies concerning them (Matthew 13:10-17).

Because Paul's message applies to us today in this dispensation of grace, however, he delivered it in plain language as intended by God. We struggle with accepting it at face value perhaps because we do not really want to believe it and do it—we do not want to be held accountable (II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 4:5). In this way, we are much like the people of Israel who did not understand the parables and continued to blindly do what they *thought* they should do. Let us take God at His word and endeavor to walk worthy of our salvation in Christ. We have an excellent example in Paul.

Paul not only instructed believers to follow his example, but he also told the Philippian brethren to observe those who walk accordingly (Philippians 3:17). To the Thessalonian brethren, who suffered persecution because of their faith (I Thessalonians 2:13-15; II Thessalonians 1:3-5), Paul said:

> **You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation** [affliction] **with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.** (I Thessalonians 1:6-7)

As children of God and members of the body of Christ, we ought to live by example. Think of all the exhortations concerning our walk that we have already examined. Are we conducting our lives in such a way that the people who know us best and with whom we associate would look to us as examples to follow? As Paul reminded his beloved coworker Timothy:

> **Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.** (I Timothy 4:12)

Being a good example does not require perfection because no one is perfect. Paul admitted to his own struggles of not doing what he should do and doing what he should not do (Romans 7:14 – 8:1). However, if we desire and discipline ourselves to walk in Christ according to the Spirit, then sin will not have control over us (Romans 6:12-14), and we will be able to be good representatives of Christ and good examples to others. We will be imitators of Paul as he was of Christ.

Chapter 9

Be of the Same Mind

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Philippians 2:1-2)

Being Like-Minded

In His prayer to His Father recorded in John 17, Jesus' primary focus was on His twelve disciples (not disciples in general—John 17:6), who were going to be left on earth to represent Him (John 17:15-18). However, His request did not apply to Judas Iscariot because it was prophesied that he—the son of perdition—would betray Him (John 13:18; 17:12; Psalm 41:9). Of course, it was already known by our Lord that Matthias would replace Judas as one of the twelve apostles, so His prayer directly applied to Matthias, also (Acts 1:15-26).

"But now I [*Jesus Christ*] **come to You** [*God the Father*]**; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves** [*the disciples*]**. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one** [*Satan*]**. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word** [*message*]**; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."** (John 17:13-24)

Not only did our Lord pray that His disciples would be as one—perfected in unity *in the truth* (John 17:17-19) just as He is one with God the Father—but that those who would be saved through their ministry would also be one (John 17:20-21). It is interesting to note that, although Jesus told His disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12-17), there is no record in the books of Matthew through John that He commanded or exhorted His twelve disciples or the crowds who listened to Him to be of the same mind or to be unified in purpose. Why is this?

The partial (and temporary) fulfillment of Jesus' prayer about His disciples (called *apostles* in Acts 1:1-2) is recorded in the first part of the book of Acts. First, we see that when the apostles returned to Jerusalem after witnessing the ascension of Christ that they were of one mind devoting themselves to prayer. Then, after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles continued with one mind in the temple (Acts 2:46-47). Again, after Peter and John were released from jail, they and their companions prayed to and praised God with one accord (Acts 4:23-31). Finally, we see that they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico (porch or colonnade) at the temple (Acts 5:12). These occurrences were in fulfillment of prophecy by being a foretaste of the future kingdom when *all* believers will be perfect (and as one) because God will remove their

sin nature (heart of stone) and write the Law of Moses on their hearts (Acts 2:14-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-28; Hebrews 8:7-12; 10:16-17).

> **When they** [*the apostles*] **had entered the city** [*Jerusalem*]**, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one mind** [accord] **were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.** (Acts 1:13-14)

Brethren, although this oneness of mind described above presents God's definition of true oneness, it was miraculous and does not directly apply to us in this dispensation of grace. The apostles were of one mind because God had changed them through the power of the Holy Spirit and not because they were endeavoring to be of one mind in response to a command of God or Jesus. However, we are exhorted in several instances in Apostle Paul's letters to be of the same mind with our fellow brethren. This implies that we must do something on our part to achieve or maintain oneness with our fellow brethren. Paul's exhortations (commands) are the focus of this chapter.

As noted in the opening passage, Paul encouraged and implored his beloved brethren in Philippi to truly fellowship in love by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, being in full accord, and being intent on one purpose. What did he mean by this? I hope to demonstrate that having one mind refers to brethren humbly considering each other as equals, having the same purpose, and believing the same truth. All three of these components of oneness work together and are dependent on each other; it is not up to us to pick and choose which to follow or which to ignore.

Like-Minded in Humility

One aspect of being of the same mind is described as an expression of humility. That is, we should not consider ourselves as better than our fellow brethren, nor anyone for that matter. Humility and its opposite trait—pride—are addressed in Chapter 6 but let us briefly reexamine humility in terms of being of the same mind.

In his letter to the brethren in Rome, Paul cautioned them not to think of themselves as more privileged or deserving than others but to adjust themselves to, and humbly associate with, people of lower social position. As with Rome at that time, all nations and cultures today have a class system or social structure; America generally consists of upper, middle, and lower classes based on economic status. Consequently, believers today live in all social classes, and we are exhorted to consider each other as equals in the Lord (Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:2-3; James 2:1-4).

> **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind** [*proud*]**, but associate with the lowly** [*people of low position*]**. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** (Romans 12:16)

We need to remind ourselves that before we were saved by the undeserved grace of God, we were *all* dead in sin and walked according to the futility of our own minds (Ephesians 2:1-7; 4:17-24). When we believe the gospel of salvation, *every* believer is forgiven by God and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; 4:32)—we are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 12:12-13). Paul did not pre-judge others as to whether he should share the gospel of grace with them; he did not consider himself superior to them. Instead, he recognized and empathized with all types of people, regardless of their spiritual background or social status, to share the gospel without prejudice and yet without compromising the word of God.

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind [likeminded] **with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord** [mind] **you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept** [receive] **one another, just as Christ also accepted** [received] **us to the glory of God.** (Romans 15:5-7)

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave [servant] **to all, so that I may win** [gain] **more** [*for salvation*]**. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law** [*of Moses*]**, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law** [*Gentiles—Ephesians 4:17-19*]**, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.** (I Corinthians 9:19-23)

Besides differences in economic status, social classes may also be divided by ethnic or religious backgrounds, gender, as well as those who wield power over others versus those who are subservient to them. As believers, we should never make such distinctions because God considers us as one in the body of Christ (Romans 3:21-23; 10:11-13; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27).

There is neither Jew nor Greek [*Gentile*]**, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:28)

Like-Minded in Purpose

In addition to, and in conjunction with, being of one mind toward each other regardless of our social status, we are exhorted to be of the same mind regarding our purpose. As believers, does God intend for us to each go our own way with different spiritual goals, or does He want us to be united in our effort to serve Him and our Lord Jesus Christ? Consider the Philippian brethren who were suffering greatly because of their faith just as Paul was. Did he want them to scatter and fend for themselves, or did he want them to stand firm together by continuing in the faith?

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I [*Paul*] **come and see you** [*Philippian believers*] **or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.** (Philippians 1:27-30)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my [*Paul's*] **joy complete by being of the same mind** [likeminded]**, maintaining the same love, united in spirit** [of one accord]**, intent on one purpose** [of one mind]**.** (Philippians 2:1-2)

We see in the above passage that being intent on one purpose includes maintaining the same love. As presented in Chapter 5, walking in love appears to be the foundation or key to our daily walk as believers in Christ. We have a promise that if we indeed are like-minded and live in peace with each other that we will know the love and peace of God as we go about each day.

Finally, brethren, rejoice [farewell]**, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded** [of one mind]**, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.** (II Corinthians 13:11)

Like-Minded in the Truth

Scripture explains another way to be of the same mind with our fellow brethren. In Chapter 7 we saw that God wants us to speak the truth (instead of lying) with each other and with all our neighbors (Ephesians 4:25; I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8). There is an additional aspect of truth that is integral to our walk as believers but is often overlooked or, perhaps, intentionally disregarded by believers. That is, being of the same mind involves having a common purpose based on a solid spiritual foundation.

Brethren, the word of God is the word of truth—God's truth for us (Colossians 1:3-8; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 25:4-5; 86:11; 138:2). Unfortunately, the Bible is often used merely as a guide, as if it was up to us to decide what to believe and not to believe, and what to obey and not to obey. I am convinced that believers generally view Scripture in this way because most of us do not understand which things (e.g., commands and promises) in the Bible are written to whom and why. Often, we are more apt to believe traditional Christian teaching (which may or may not be true) and not what the Bible actually says.

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame [dishonesty]**, not walking in craftiness** [*deception*] **or adulterating** [*distorting*] **the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.** (II Corinthians 4:1-2)

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (I Thessalonians 2:13)

As I understand it and explain in Chapter 4 and Appendix C, the major division in Scripture is between prophecy (those things of God spoken *since the world began*) and the mystery (those things hidden in God *since before the world began* until revealed by Christ to and through Paul). If we do not see this difference, then we are forced to justify (i.e., explain away) or ignore conflicting commands and promises. Consequently, the word of God loses its power and we replace it with our own power, or rather our own weakness.

Be diligent [*endeavor*] **to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [doctrine]**, for reproof, for correction, for training** [instruction] **in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate** [*complete*]**, equipped** [thoroughly furnished] **for every good work.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

For the Philippian brethren, who were suffering the same kind of persecution for their faith that Paul was suffering, their foundation was the truth of the word of God as taught to them by Paul and his coworkers. More specifically, it was the gospel of the grace of God that was revealed to them (and to us through Paul's letters), according to the revelation of the mystery that had been committed to Paul. They were commended for their participation in the gospel (Philippians 1:3-5) and further encouraged to continue standing firm as they faced persecution, with one mind, for the faith (the truth) of the gospel (Philippians 1:27-30). Do we have the same purpose and foundation?

Just as the men of God before him, such as Moses, David, the prophets, John the Baptist, the apostles, Stephen, etc., Paul endeavored to speak—and live—the truth of God's word to everyone he ministered to

despite the consequences to himself. His intent, according to the will of God, was to teach them to build them up and strengthen them so that they could withstand the attacks of Satan and stand for the truth against false doctrine (II Corinthians 13:8-9; Ephesians 6:10-17; Colossians 1:24-29). We need to heed and obey his teaching and commands because they directly apply to us, also. If we do, then we will be of one mind in the faith as Paul desired the Philippian brethren to be.

> **I** [*David*] **have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation** [*assembly of Israel*]**; behold, I will not** [*do not*] **restrain my lips, O Lord, You know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great congregation.** (Psalm 40:9-10)

> **And He** [*God*][1] **gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints** [*believers*] **for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine** [*teaching*]**, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.** (Ephesians 4:11-16)

> **For God is my witness, how I** [*Paul*] **long for you all** [*Philippian believers*] **with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve** [*learn to sense*] **the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.** (Philippians 1:8-11)

Not Being of the Same Mind

Sadly, it has been my experience that it is difficult for believers to be of the same mind regarding humility, purpose, and truth, or even in one of these attributes for very long. Because every believer still has a sin nature, sin gets in the way of true fellowship as one and is often manifested as pride or jealousy, or even a feeling of inadequacy when we compare ourselves with others. I have been involved in small groups of believers where we seemed to be of one mind at least for a time. Often, however, the truth of God's word *gets in the way* of continued unity because of opposition to the truth or disregarding it. Even concerning the Philippian brethren, who seemed to be of one mind, it was Paul's desire that he would hear that they indeed were standing firm in the faith and were of one mind (Philippians 1:27 – 2:2).

The Colossian brethren, who (like the Philippians) Paul also deeply loved and was thankful for (Colossians 1:1-8), apparently were being subjected to, and perhaps influenced by, false teaching. Paul encouraged them to remember that they were complete in Christ and not to succumb to legalistic doctrine according to the

[1] Because of punctuation that may have been incorrectly applied by Bible translators and editors, the immediate context suggests that *He* refers to Christ (Ephesians 4:7-10). However, the overall context of Ephesians tells us that it is God the Father who chose us and blessed us with all spiritual blessings through the work of Christ at the cross (Ephesians 1:3-23; 2:4-10; 3:1-12, 20-21; 4:32; 5:1-2; 6:10-17). As more directly stated in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul said that it was God the Father who gave us the ministers of His word to equip and build us up as members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-18, 27-28).

traditions of men (Colossians 2:8-19). The Galatian brethren, however, had definitely embraced false teaching—they had become persuaded to believe that God expected them to obey at least parts of the Law of Moses as part of their worship. Paul called them foolish for doing so (Galatians 3:1-5). He devoted most of his letter to them reminding the brethren (as he had first explained when he was with them—Galatians 1:6-9) that God had completely taken the Law out of the way through Christ's death for us (Galatians 3:10-14).

> **If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees** [ordinances]**, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings** [doctrines] **of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement** [*false* humility] **and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.** (Colossians 2:20-23)

> **However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those** [*idols*] **which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years** [*as in or similar to the Law of Moses*]**. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:8-11)

> **You** [*Galatian believers*] **were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?** (Galatians 5:7)

Paul prophetically warned his beloved coworker Timothy that believers would not only succumb to false teaching but would desire it. The fulfillment of that dire prophecy already started during Paul's ministry as described above concerning the Galatian brethren. Near the end of his life, Paul lamented how so many of the people with whom he ministered had turned away from him (II Timothy 1:15-18). If we are honest about the vast array of doctrines (which are a mixture of the truth of God and traditions of men) taught in most of our Christian churches and organizations today, we must admit that false teaching—and believers embracing false teaching—has only gotten worse since then.

> **But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some** [*believers*] **will fall away from** [*abandon*] **the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.** (I Timothy 4:1-3)

> **I** [*Paul*] **solemnly charge you** [*Timothy*] **in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction** [doctrine]**. For the time will come when they** [*believers*] **will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.** (II Timothy 4:1-4)

So, what should we do if we are confronted with false doctrine? Should we simply be quiet for the sake of unity or should we stand firm in the faith, whether with like-minded brethren or alone? Regarding fellow brethren who were listening to and believing false teaching, Paul exhorted Timothy to always be ready—whether the opportunity seemed to be favorable or unfavorable (i.e., convenient or inconvenient, or welcome or unwelcome)—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort them with sound (correct) doctrine but with great patience.

God expects the same from us. That is, we are to use Scripture correctly, and humbly, to help others potentially understand the truth of God's word by His grace (Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-12).

> **The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.** (II Timothy 2:24-26)

How do our Christian denominations fit into this picture of being of one mind in humility, purpose, and truth? If we stand firm in the faith, defending the word of God against false traditions and teaching, what might happen to our fellowship with other brethren? I would like to respond to these questions for your consideration.

Denominations

We have a couple hundred *Christian* denominations in America (and thousands worldwide), each appealing to their membership and congregations. There are some causes or activities (some of which are worthy, but many are not) in which many of them join together, showing an apparent unity among themselves (e.g., efforts against hunger or homelessness, national prayer, Christmas and Easter observances, etc.). However, it is a false unity because they all differ in various points of doctrine and cannot come to agreement regarding the truth of God's word.

I believe that Paul's warning to the Corinthian brethren regarding their factions, which resulted from their jealousies or perceived superiority (pride), is an indictment of *all* the various Christian denominations today (I Corinthians 3:1-3). Furthermore, Paul warned the Galatian brethren in no uncertain terms against listening to or following false doctrine, which they were guilty of doing.

> **Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas** [*Peter*]**," and "I of Christ."** (I Corinthians 1:10-12)

> **For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere** [*carnal*] **men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.** (I Corinthians 3:4-6)

> **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before** [*when we were with you*]**, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.** (Galatians 1:8-10)

As an example of false unity, I knew a couple who were members of a nondenominational Christian motorcycle club that had periodic destination rides and gatherings. They made it a point to say how wonderful it was to be with a group of fellow Christians who had a common interest (motorcycles) and who loved Jesus but did not discuss anything about Bible doctrine; they set their differences and the word of God aside in the name of fellowship. Was this honoring to God?

So many of us who call ourselves *Christians* differ on such important things as how a person is saved, God's message for us today in this dispensation of grace, who we pray to, and how He has commanded us to live (and not to live) as His children. Is this what God desires of His children when we fellowship together in His name and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ? Does He want us to avoid or disregard His word to be united just for the sake of Christian unity? Did Moses and the prophets of God, David, John the Baptist, Jesus and His twelve disciples, Stephen, James, or Paul do this or ever say that we should do this? I cannot find any such example or exhortation in Scripture.

The religious leaders of the Jews at the time of Jesus' ministry—the chosen people of God—were the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. They had usurped the God-given authority of the Levites (Numbers 3:5-10; 8:5-11; Deuteronomy 10:8-9) and had adulterated the Law of Moses to their own advantage (Matthew 15:1-9; 23:1-3), thus leading God's people astray. For example, there was no mention of or provision for synagogues in the Law of Moses, and yet the people gathered for worship in synagogues on the sabbath day (Luke 4:16; 13:10-17; Matthew 6:1-5; 10:16-18; 23:34). This was in direct violation of the Law because they were commanded by God to stay in their own dwellings on that day (Exodus 16:22-30; 35:1-3; Leviticus 23:3).[2] It should not be a surprise that our Lord had *nothing* good to say about the religious leaders of His people (Matthew 16:1-12, 21; 20:17-19; 23:1-36).

We know of two Jewish factions (denominations) that existed during Jesus' ministry. The Pharisees supposedly believed in the prophesied resurrection of the last days (which will occur—see Appendix C), but the Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:6-8). However, both factions were dishonoring to God because their overall doctrines were self-serving and false. Perhaps the Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews were another faction or denomination (Acts 6:1; 9:29).

With these things in mind, should we be a member of a denomination? Although there are some organizations, independent churches, and Bible study groups that do so, I am not aware of any organized Christian denominations in America that recognize the revelation of the mystery and teach the gospel of the grace of God. For most of us, then, which denomination do we fellowship with? I was an official member of two churches of different denominations in the 1970s (Conservative Baptist and Evangelical Free). After several doctrine-related instances in both churches, however, I realized that I could not continue to fellowship in either church without compromising or disregarding my understanding of the truth of God's word. Thankfully, however, I attended two independent gospel of grace-based churches in the 1970s and 1980s (in Thornton, Colorado, and Laramie, Wyoming), but I was not a member of either one. I briefly describe my experience with the Berean Church in Thornton in my study **Testimony of Grace**.

As I recall, the church in Laramie, started and led by Pastor Frank Moore, was not organized as a nonprofit tax-exempt entity, did not have a board of directors, did not have an official membership, and the pastor did not receive a salary (he had a fulltime job without weekend commitments). Financial giving by the attendees was not considered to be charitable (tax-deductible)—they were true gifts. The money went toward property taxes and building maintenance, as well as toward outside ministries (including his weekly radio ministry) as approved by majority agreement. The attendees also collected an annual financial gift for the pastor in appreciation of his service to them. I highly respected this church arrangement.

Because of the warnings and examples in Scripture, I do not recommend that believers be recognized (official) members of any denomination. However, we need fellowship with other believers (Hebrews

[2] Those ministering to the people in accordance with the Law of Moses, including the Levites, Jesus, and His disciples could do so on sabbath days because it was not considered to be laborious work and because they did not live in their own dwellings. This is described in my study **The Law of Moses**.

10:23-25). Perhaps a local independent church might be a good fit, with a pastor that might be open to learning about the mystery and the gospel of grace. Afterall, God used Aquila and his wife Priscilla to help Apollos understand the gospel of grace, who then became a valuable coworker of Paul (Acts 18:24-28; I Corinthians 3:5-9; 4:6). For my wife and me, leading my own Bible study groups wherever we have lived has been our main source of fellowship.

Please seriously and prayerfully think about this, fellow brother or sister in Christ. Are you of one mind in humility, purpose, *and* truth with other brethren, or are you of one mind with other believers in false unity as the Galatian brethren had become, thus bringing dishonor to God and our Lord Jesus Christ?

Separate Ourselves from Sinful Brethren

I hope I have adequately demonstrated that God expects us to believe, live according to, and stand for the truth of His word in humility and grace. This is contrary to the worldliness around us, but we cannot go out of this world (I Corinthians 5:9-10). Instead, as believers we are ambassadors for Christ in this evil world and have been entrusted with the word of reconciliation—the gospel of salvation (II Corinthians 5:17-21; I Corinthians 15:1-4).

As addressed in Chapter 5, opposition to our stand for Christ may not come so much from nonbelievers as from fellow brethren. What if they reject the truth even when we present it in a humble manner with honorable intentions? Should we just avoid or stop discussing Scriptural truths to maintain peace amongst ourselves? If we do so, how do we decide which truths of God to teach and talk about and which ones to avoid? How does that honor God and His word? We may end up finding that our discussions become merely opinions—in the absence of truth—where each of us can find our own way. Brethren, this is not God's way. He has revealed His will, and He expects us to believe and obey it.

Fellow brethren who oppose the truth through their arguments or sinful lifestyles will destroy true unity and could influence others to sin, or at least lead them to disregard or accept the sin of the offender (I Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:7-9). As hard as it is to do, we may either need to separate them from our midst or separate ourselves from them. We will likely be judged by fellow brethren for doing so, but are we honoring to God and our Lord Jesus Christ if we do not do so (Galatians 1:10)? Please consider the following exhortations from Scripture.

> **It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles** [*heathen*]**, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst** [*fellowship*]**.** (I Corinthians 5:1-2)
>
> **I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother** [*believer or professing believer*] **if he is an immoral person, or covetous** [*greedy*]**, or an idolater, or a reviler** [*slanderer*]**, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders** [*nonbelievers*]**? Do you not judge those who are within the church** [*fellow brethren*]**? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.** (I Corinthians 5:9-13)
>
> **Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on** [*be on guard against*] **those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from** [avoid] **them. For such**

men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting [*naïve people*]**.** (Romans 16:17-18)

But avoid foolish controversies [questions] **and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law** [*of Moses*]**, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted** [*corrupted*] **and is sinning, being self-condemned.** (Titus 3:9-11)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother [*fellow believer*] **who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition** [*instruction*] **which you received from us.** (II Thessalonians 3:6)

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame [*feel* ashamed]**. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish** [*warn*] **him as a brother.** (II Thessalonians 3:14-15)

How many warnings do we need, brethren, before we understand the seriousness of the truth of the word of God and that He is serious that we obey it? I am afraid that the truth of God is so watered down, changed (corrupted), or avoided, that Christianity today does not know what it is.

Are We Like-Minded?

The Philippian believers, as well as those in Thessalonica and perhaps the other cities in which Paul and his coworkers established churches suffered extreme persecution like the persecution suffered by the believing Jews in Jerusalem (Philippians 1:29-30; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:14-16). Remember how Paul, before he was saved, was a Jewish Pharisee who was driven to destroy the followers of Jesus wherever they happened to be living. Like the believing Jews who were persecuted by their own people, the Philippian and Thessalonian believers were being persecuted by their own people, likely because they were not participating with everyone else in idol worship (I Thessalonians 1:8-10). It was during their persecution that Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to be of the same mind. They could be strengthened *together* through the grace and peace of God.

As we have seen, Paul often spoke of the need for believers to be of the same mind. Except for only a couple of instances that specifically pertained to humility, his exhortations were in the context of being of the same mind in purpose according to the truth of God's word. This was because the believers who he had established through his ministry of the gospel of the grace of God were being influenced by false doctrine or, in the case of the Galatian brethren, had been turned away from the truth by believing false teaching.

Brethren, we have been commanded to be of the same mind in humility, purpose, *and* truth. This should be our desire and goal. I have experienced the joy that comes from being with a group of fellow believers who are of one mind. However, I have also experienced the heartbreak of division when some argue against or turn away from the truth, thus detrimentally affecting the entire group. Being of one mind with other brethren is my desire and thus is a motivation to teach the word of God as patiently and accurately as possible with love, humility, and grace.

Therefore I [*Paul*]**, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you** [*brethren*] **to walk in a manner worthy of the calling** [*salvation*] **with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope**

[*eternal life*] **of your calling** [*salvation*]**; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in** [you] **all.** (Ephesians 4:1-6)

So, as those who have been chosen of God [*i.e., believers*]**, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.** (Colossians 3:12-14)

Chapter 10

Submit to Our Governing Authorities

Note: I first prepared a study on this subject soon after the 2016 presidential election and posted it on our website prior to the 2020 election. I had taught some aspects of the subject beginning in the 1990s and, for the most part, avoided making direct correlations to American politics or leaders (the only example I can recall is speaking against the imminent invasion of Iraq in 2003). Even so, the conservative Christian and political hold on my fellow brethren was so powerful that my lessons were met with disbelief (silent judgment) and one occasion of verbally abusive objection during which no one—there were dozens in attendance—spoke up in my defense. The biggest problem I encountered was a rejection of what Scripture says about governmental authority and how it applies to our walk as believers—I did not teach what they expected (or wanted) to hear. So, I decided to put all my thoughts on paper that included what I had really wanted to teach all along. With only limited updates after the 2020 election, and some modifications to avoid repetition within this book, this chapter represents what I originally wrote because this is what I believe. I do not address events as they are unfolding at the time of this writing (2025) and will let this study speak for itself.

> **Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.** (Romans 13:1-2)

An Important Subject

We have looked at many scriptural exhortations, which are equivalent to being commandments by God (Exodus 34:32; I Thessalonians 4:11; II Thessalonians 3:6), regarding our walk as children of God. Each one is provided to help us know what God expects of us to walk worthy of our salvation. If we are honest with ourselves, we have a lot to work on to live up to God's expectations. Because of our sin nature, we struggle with living as we ought to live because God's ways are often contrary to what we believe we should do or what we actually do. Perhaps we were not even aware what the Bible says about some of the components of our walk.

In this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate (as I understand it) what God expects of us regarding subjecting ourselves to our governing authorities. I consider this to be important enough to warrant its own chapter because I believe that much of what is taught by our Christian leaders, pastors, and teachers is not in accordance with Scripture on this subject. How many of us really believe, or understand, the introductory passage above from Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Rome?

Before I begin, I think a definition of terms would be helpful. In the context of this study, being in subjection to our governing authorities is the same as being in submission to them. That is, *subjection* and *submission* and their associated words or terms are translated from the same Greek word *hupotasso* (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1-2). Basically, to subject ourselves is to recognize the authority of someone or something over us and to respond appropriately (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:21-24; I Corinthians 16:15-16; I Peter 5:5; Titus 2:9-10).

Judging from my own experiences and observations, as a believer who is a white American of European descent, it is probably true that American Christians *in general* are proud of our democracy, and many believe that this nation has been especially blessed by God. I am not so naïve to not realize that this sentiment may not be as widely held among fellow brethren who are American people of color. This chapter is not about

racism, but it is irresponsible not to consider the subject in the context of God's commands regarding our governing authorities and our daily lives (our walk) as children of God.[1]

Some Christian denominations and brethren believe and teach that we are the Israel of today, or at least that God is working out His will for the world through us as He did through Israel of the Bible. Therefore, it is believed that God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament apply to America today. For example, it is believed that if we as a nation *turn back to God* then He will bless us in the same manner that He promised to bless Israel (e.g., II Chronicles 7:14). Is this what the Bible says?

Let us examine what Scripture says about governing authority and how it applies to us today. Is our democratic form of government covered by Scripture, or is God working differently now than He did in times past? Can America claim the promises that God gave to Israel? Do believers in America have constitutional or Christian rights that we can claim to protect and promote our beliefs or to prevent persecution? I hope to show that these questions are directly applicable to our walk for God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Please keep in mind that this is directed to believers—children of God—and is not about changing how society views its government or God.

Before going into the details of this study on governing authority, I want to establish that I am an American citizen by birth. I am thankful to God that I can live in this country and enjoy the freedoms that come with citizenship. I have had the privilege of living in Indiana, Florida, Colorado, and Wyoming, as well as working or traveling in nearly every other state. Despite its many faults, I do not have a desire to live in any other country. However, I do not worship America and avoid boasting about my country at the expense of other countries.

Although America is not unique in its scope of constitutional freedoms, there are many countries in this world that do not provide the freedoms that we often take for granted. As a believer, however, I know that true freedom is not dependent on national origin or laws. All believers are free in Christ and are citizens of heaven and, as such, we should not preoccupy ourselves regarding our political circumstances regardless of the country God has chosen to place us.

I use the term *Christian rights* throughout this chapter (as well as in Chapter 12) because many Christians in America are convinced that their rights as children of God are being infringed upon by the government or other religions. Furthermore, perceived Christian rights are often tied to our constitutional rights as Americans. Are these common perspectives supported by Scripture? Do we have Christian rights in the eyes of God?

America is Not Spiritual Israel

I was taught in church, directly and by inference, that America is spiritual Israel and God's chosen nation in this day. That is, American Christians can and should claim the promises that God gave to Israel. Brethren, it needs to be established upfront that America is not spiritual Israel nor God's chosen nation. In fact, He has no chosen nation today, including the political State of Israel.

Regarding the claim that America will be blessed as promised if we turn back to God, we need to take a close look at II Chronicles 7:14 and its context.

[1] See my study **No Room for Racism** for an analysis of racism through a scriptural perspective.

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

It is not unusual to see the above verse referenced or fully written (usually in the *King James Version*) on highway billboards and on posters or hand-held signs at sporting and other events with substantial media coverage across the United States. The message that is sincerely trying to be conveyed is that if America returns to its Christian roots and obeys the commandments of God, then God will restore our land to Himself. Unfortunately, this and similar verses are being taken out of context and never were intended for anyone but the nation of Israel. It is using Scripture incorrectly and is seriously wrong.

There is a widely believed but gravely mistaken impression among many Americans, primarily believers and those who falsely profess to be Christians, that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. This is the very heart of a long-standing evangelical or conservative Christian movement in this country currently referred to by some proponents as *Christian nationalism*. I was first exposed to similar teaching propagated by the Christian organization *Moral Majority* in the late 1970s, but the same concepts go back to the time of the Puritans in New England, long before we were a sovereign nation, and later through the expansionist principles of *Manifest Destiny* during the 1800s. Brethren, America never has been and never will be God's chosen nation or a Christian nation in any scriptural sense. Nor can we claim the promises that God gave to the nation of Israel.

In the above verse, the Lord God had appeared (by some means—a dream or vision) to King Solomon after Solomon had completed construction of the temple of God in Jerusalem. Israel was prosperous at the time, mostly because God was honoring His promises to the former King David, who was Solomon's father (II Samuel 7:12-17; I Kings 2:1-4). God warned Solomon that if He had to punish the people of Israel and their land for their sins, He would forgive them and restore their land only if they humbled themselves before God and turned from their wicked ways (II Chronicles 7:11-14). In this communication from God, He was reiterating the promises and consequences associated with His requirement for full obedience to His entire covenant with Israel—the commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 7:11-24; 8:6-10; 28:1-68; Leviticus 26:1-46).

Although Solomon was used mightily by God, he was disobedient and the people of Israel were disobedient (I Kings 11:9-13). Because of his disobedience, God divided Israel into two kingdoms during the reign of Solomon's son, and the nation was never restored. In accordance with prophecy, however, the nation will be restored in the future (after the rapture). The tribes of Israel will be reunited by the will of God in the land that He promised them (Ezekiel 36:22-38; 37:15-28). Please read the referenced passages in Ezekiel (and related passages such as Jeremiah 31:31-34, Acts 3:17-26, and Hebrews 8:7-12), and it should be apparent that the Israel of today is not a fulfillment of those prophecies.

Brethren, it is very presumptuous—and wrong—to claim for ourselves the promises given exclusively to the nation of Israel. It is also presumptuous for us to think we can succeed where Israel failed. Furthermore, to claim these promises means that we would have to completely obey the entire Law of Moses. Trying to do so ignores the fact that we have a sin nature and will continue to sin (Romans 7:18-25) and nullifies the work of Christ at the cross for us. Most Christians do not fully understand that God figuratively nailed the Law of

Moses to the cross with Christ—He took its requirements and condemnation out of our way (Romans 3:21-28; 6:14; 7:4-6; 8:1-4; Galatians 3:10-14; Colossians 2:13-14).[2]

There is nothing about *Christian nationalism* that is in accordance with the word of God. The proponents of this movement do not obey the Law of Moses because they cannot do so (nor should they even try to do so). To try to get the rest of the country to be obedient to God (whether it be obeying the Ten Commandments, the entire Law of Moses, or the Bible as a whole) denies their own disobedience and is extremely hypocritical. God is not working through a chosen nation (or nations) today but through individual believers regardless of the nation in which they live. Each child of God is an ambassador for Christ, representing Him in this sinful world.

God's promises to Israel and prophecies concerning Israel were just that—they were only to Israel. No other nation can adopt or claim any of those promises for itself. That God has not fulfilled all His promises to Israel is due to their rejection of Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the witness of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:1-8, 22-23; 6:8-15; 7:51-60). Due to its unbelief, God temporarily (to this day and longer) blinded Israel and set the nation aside (Romans 11:25-29; II Corinthians 3:12-16). He interrupted His prophetic plan and promises for His chosen nation to usher in the dispensation of His grace through Paul (Ephesians 3:1-12). Sometime after the close of this dispensation, which will end at the rapture, God will restore Israel to Himself and will fulfill all His promises to that nation.

> **For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed** [ignorant] **of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening** [*temporary* blindness] **has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** (Romans 11:25)

Many of us tend to focus on the good of our country, and there is much that has been good here and in our efforts around the world. However, as with all nations, God uses our nation for purposes of honor *and* dishonor according to His eternal plan (Romans 9:19-24). An unbiased assessment of our history will reveal how imperfect (and, in truth, ungodly) our nation actually has been and continues to be.

- According to our Declaration of Independence, "all men are created equal." Unfortunately, however:
  - *All men* did not include women.
  - *All men* did not include the native Americans, African Americans (most of whom were slaves and not considered to be Americans), or any people of non-European descent. *Perhaps*, and I am only guessing, the phrase meant that no one should be a king and that European American men were just as equal to the task of self-government as British men.
- Apparently, most of our founding fathers were Freemasons and not godly Christians as many Christians of today would like to believe. Masonry is a religion (members meet at a temple), and Masons worship the god of all religions. The *God* invoked by our founding fathers was a god of their imagination and not the Almighty God (Colossians 2:18-23; II Corinthians 4:3-4). They used some concepts from the Bible in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, but the same can be said for the governing documents of many countries.
- We have the constitutional freedom to worship whomever or whatever we please. Because anything or everything is worshiped by our citizens, America may be one of the most pagan countries in the world.

[2] See my study **The Law of Moses** that explains God's covenant with Israel and why the jurisdiction of the Law, including the Ten Commandments, does not apply to us today.

- We have a long history of racism and bigotry, both of which continue to be common in our society and culture as it seems to be in most (perhaps all) countries.

There appears to be a severe lack of scriptural understanding and humility regarding how Christians view our country. Instead of trying to get our nation to humble itself before God, we need to take a candid look at ourselves.

Governing Authorities are Established by God

In an effort to claim some of the promises to Israel, a belief propagated by Christian political organizations, and some Christian colleges, denominations, churches, and individual brethren, is that the key to national repentance is voting in the right leadership. By doing so, it is thought that America will return to God and be blessed accordingly, and that Christian persecution and the erosion of our perceived Christian rights will subside or cease. In other words, the thinking is that God has left it up to us—made it our responsibility—to make sure the right people are in office. Is this viewpoint supported by Scripture?

> **Every person** [*believer*—Romans 1:7] **is to be in subjection to the governing authorities** [higher powers]**. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance** [*commandment*] **of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.** (Romans 13:1-7)

> **Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution** [ordinance of man]**, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves** [servants] **of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood** [*fellow brethren*]**, fear God, honor the king.** (I Peter 2:13-17)

(See also Titus 3:1-2)

Consider the political environment under which the apostles Paul and Peter wrote these passages according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (i.e., they wrote the word of God and not their own thoughts or reasonings—II Timothy 3:16-17; I Thessalonians 2:13; II Peter 1:20-21). Israel was a conquered colony of the Roman Empire; Israel of that day consisted of the remnants of Judea, which was equivalent to the Kingdom of Judah in the Old Testament. As with most of its colonies, Rome allowed the people of Judea to retain their form of leadership, but the leadership was subservient to the authority in Rome. Therefore, Judea still had a Jewish king, though approved or appointed by the Roman Senate.

Judea, however, was governed by a governor of Rome (Pontius Pilate during the time of Jesus' crucifixion and later Felix and Festus—Matthew 27:11-14; Acts 23:23-24; 24:27) who answered directly to the Roman emperor or Caesar. Herod (known historically as Herod the Great and later as Herod I) was King of Judea

during the time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:1), and Paul made his defense before King Agrippa (Acts 25:23 – 26:32; also known historically as Herod Agrippa II). These were the governing authorities—the Caesar of the Roman Empire, the Roman governor over the region that included Judea, and the Jewish King of Judea—that both Paul and Peter referred to and instructed the brethren to be in subjection to.

All those in authority, whether President, Governor, Mayor, Prime Minister, Chairman, Chancellor, Generalissimo, King or Queen, Czar, Emperor, Caesar, Pharaoh, etc. (and, yes, even Führer), are in authority by the will of God—He uses them for His purpose (Romans 9:14-21; Psalm 103:19; Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 4:34-35). American Christians may think we have the responsibility and power to put *our man* or *God's man* in office, but what makes us more politically influential in accomplishing the will of God than believers who live in nondemocratic countries, whose leaders are also in power by the will of God? We must be careful who we support and why, because God may have planned to place our choice in authority for the purpose of dishonorable use or as a vessel of wrath (Romans 9:21-22; Proverbs 16:4).

> **What shall we say then? There is no injustice** [unrighteousness] **with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use** [honour] **and another for common use** [dishonour]**? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.** (Romans 9:14-24)

As for turning our nation back to God, brethren, America has never been a godly nation. Israel was rarely godly, but the nation was chosen by God as His nation, and He will eventually restore Israel to Himself. He will miraculously *cause* them to see their sinfulness and to repent of their sins, and the believing remnant will inherit the kingdom that God promised them long ago (Zechariah 12:10-14; Ezekiel 36:22-38; 37:21-28; Acts 3:17-26). America has no such promises from God. God will install the leaders of His choice, regardless of how believers vote or encourage others to vote, and His sovereign purpose will be fulfilled. All believers who are in a position of political authority should be humbled by this truth.

What Does Being Subject to Our Governing Authorities Mean?

As with everything else regarding our daily walk as God's children—members of the body of Christ—God did not leave it to our imagination to figure out what He meant by us being subject to our governing authorities. According to Romans 13:1-7:

- We are to be in subjection to our governing authorities or higher powers.
- There is no authority except from God, and those that exist are established by God (see also Colossians 1:16-17; Psalm 103:19).
- Those who resist authority have opposed the authority of God and will receive condemnation upon themselves (see also Exodus 22:28).

- Those in authority are ministers or instruments of God for our good (e.g., all governments have laws against murder, stealing, etc.). They are avengers who bring wrath upon (judge) those who practice evil.
- We are to be in subjection because of wrath and for conscience' sake. That is, we should do what is good or right; doing what is wrong (e.g., breaking laws of our government) results in punishment.
- We are to render to all that is due them: taxes (see also Luke 20:19-26), custom, fear (respect), and honor.

Additionally, according to I Peter 2:13-17:

- We are to submit ourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution whether it be a king or a governor sent by the king (in our case, the hierarchy of authority is our president, governor, and mayor or equivalent).
- Submitting ourselves to those in authority is according to the will of God and is the right thing to do.
- We are to *act* as free people (regardless if we are politically free or not) in the service of God; we are not to use our freedom in Christ, however, as a covering or excuse for doing what is wrong (see also Galatians 5:1, 13).
- We are to honor all people (including those in positions of authority), love our fellow brethren, and fear God (i.e., be in submission to Him because He is the sovereign Almighty God and is greater than all human authority).

Neither political nor personal freedom is an issue with God. All who are saved are free in Christ (Romans 8:1-2; Galatians 5:13; II Corinthians 3:17). We are free from the bondage of the Law of Moses and are one in Christ, whether slave or free, Jew or Gentile, or male or female (Galatians 3:27-28; 5:1; I Corinthians 12:12-13). We should not seek to be politically or personally free; the people of Israel were not free during the time of Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Instead, we are exhorted to be content in our circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:6-8). If we are offered or given our freedom, however, we should take it (I Corinthians 7:21-24).

We are to obey our local, state, and federal laws. Most laws are for our good. Although I might be wrong, I am not aware of any current laws in America that *cause* or *force* a person to sin. However, for us to exercise the benefit of every law is not right, and probably most nations (including America) do have laws that, if exercised or obeyed, are sinful. For example:

- Lawsuits are legal, but we should not sue others (I Corinthians 6:1-8).
- Getting drunk is legal (over a certain age), but we are not to get drunk (Ephesians 5:18).
- Being sexually immoral is legal in most cases, but we are to flee immorality (I Corinthians 6:18).
- Laws of prejudice should not be exercised to our advantage or to the detriment of someone else (Romans 12:1-3, 16; Galatians 3:27-28).

Should We Always Obey Our Governing Authorities?

We, as members of the body of Christ, are subject to our governing authorities. In fact, all believers in all dispensations have been subject to their governing authorities. God has established the authorities for our good and to administer His wrath. God wants us to render to our authorities all that is due to them. However, does God desire that we do *everything* that our authorities desire or demand? What if we are required to do something wrong—something that is contrary to the will of God as revealed to us in Scripture? We must do what is right and accept the consequences without crying out "Injustice!" or "Persecution!"

There are examples in Scripture where God's people were honored by God for disobeying their governing authorities, including the following:

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow down to the idol of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (i.e., the Babylonian Empire that was later known as the Chaldean Empire) knowing that they would be cast into a blazing furnace if they did not do so. They did not know that God would miraculously keep them from harm (Daniel 3:8-30).
- Daniel prayed to God contrary to a law of King Darius of Babylon and was cast into a lion's den. He did not know that God would miraculously keep him from harm (Daniel 6:1-28).
- Peter and John defied the Jewish religious leaders when ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:1-20). Although the religious leaders did not have governing authority, they had the authority to turn them over to the Roman government as they did with Jesus and later with Paul. Furthermore, it is most likely that Peter and John would have defied Roman authorities had they been given the same order by them.

Consider the time of Nazi Germany (1933 – 1945). Laws and directives were instituted to persecute Jews and other people considered to be unacceptable for various reasons by the government. Those who did not expose their neighbors, and those who hid their neighbors (or even complete strangers) from the authorities, faced imprisonment, were sent to forced-labor camps, and/or were tortured or executed for their crimes against the government. These consequences often applied to relatives of the *law breakers* regardless of their involvement.

As believers, we should consider what we would have done under those circumstances. Would we have complied with the law, or would we have done the right thing despite the consequences? Unfortunately, these things are happening in parts of the world today and, at some point, this may not be a hypothetical question even in America (I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5). Brethren, would we try to protect a Jew, Muslim, homeless person, drug addict, homosexual person, physically or mentally impaired adult or child, a woman who had an abortion or miscarriage, or whatever other type of person the government may decide is unacceptable (Luke 5:27-32; Romans 13:8-10; I Corinthians 10:23-24; Galatians 5:13-14)? I hope I would despite the consequences.

Resisting Our Governing Authorities

Although believers have God's authority to disobey laws that are contrary to the written will of God as noted above, do we have the right to challenge or fight against our governing authorities? Please recall the passages in Romans 13 and I Peter 2. According to those two passages, we have no directive from God or supporting Scripture to resist our governing authorities because they are in power according to His will. Claiming it as our Christian right or responsibility to do so would be taking the name of God in vain—it is contrary to His will. Please consider the following examples from Scripture about obeying those in authority.

David and King Saul

David and King Saul had an incredibly complex relationship. At times, Saul had David play a harp to soothe him (I Samuel 16:14-23). At other times, because of his jealousy, Saul actively sought David's death (I Samuel 18:6-11, 17; 19:1). Although Saul most likely was not saved (I Samuel 16:14-15), he was anointed as King of Israel by God and David understood this (I Samuel 9:15-17; II Samuel 1:14-16).

Consequently, David did not, as one might have thought he would, try to overthrow Saul or try to kill him in response to the unjust treatment by Saul. When Saul was mortally wounded in battle yet still lived, he

requested another man to kill him. David subsequently held that man accountable for killing the king (II Samuel 1-16). In his obedience to God, David understood that it was not up to himself or any other man to remove Saul from his God-appointed position.

Daniel

Because of Israel's disobedience to God, God worked through the Babylonians to subdue the nation of Israel (II Kings 24:10 – 25:21). Many of the Israelites from Jerusalem and Judah were transported to Babylon as slaves (II Chronicles 36:15-21). Some of them, including Daniel, were found to have skills beneficial to their captors and were put to work for the kings and kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 1:1-21).

With positions of trust in the ungodly kingdom, one might think that Daniel and other Israelites would have done whatever was necessary to resist the Babylonians so that they could return to Israel. They did not do this, however. In due time, according to God's plan as prophesied by Jeremiah, the Israelites were released and returned to their own land (II Chronicles 36:22-23).

Jesus, Peter, and Paul

During the time of Jesus, Peter, and Paul, the Caesar of Rome was the supreme authority over an empire that encompassed the Mediterranean region, and his governors were his representatives in the Roman colonies (including Israel). None of them complained about the injustices or encouraged the brethren to rise up against Roman authority. As we know, Jesus did not even defend Himself before the Roman governor (Pontius Pilate) because He knew that God was working out His will through the unrighteous religious leaders of Israel and the Roman government (Mark 15:1-5; Acts 4:27-28).

When Paul stood before Judea's King Agrippa in his defense against false accusations, he did not plead for mercy for himself. Instead, he used the opportunity to speak the truth regarding Christ (Acts 26:19-29). Furthermore, during his imprisonment in Rome, many people within the household and among the personal guard of the Caesar were saved through Paul's teaching and testimony of faith (Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22). There is no hint in Scripture, however, of Paul encouraging those people (or anyone else) to rise up against the Caesar or his government despite the terrible persecution against believers in Roman-controlled cities (Philippians 1:27-30; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:14-16; 3:6-8; II Thessalonians 1:3-5).

Moses—An Exception

According to God's purpose and plan, the people of Israel resided in Egypt for 430 years and were slaves to the Pharaohs for much of that time (Exodus 1:8-14; 12:40-41). Moses had been raised by the daughter of the Pharaoh of his day. This was part of God's plan, and He used Moses to request that Pharaoh let the people of Israel go. The Pharaoh resisted, in part because he would lose a workforce of a vast number of enslaved people (Exodus 1:7-10; 5:4-5). However, God worked through Moses to bring His people out of Egypt to eventually settle in the land that God had promised to their forefathers (Exodus 2:23-24; 3:6-8).

Moses, therefore, stood up to the Pharaoh and disobeyed his orders to stay in Egypt. Was Moses wrong in doing this? In this case, no. God specifically revealed His will to Moses and worked many miracles through Moses (to the detriment of the Pharaoh and his people—Exodus 7 – 11; 14:13-31) to provide a miraculous means of escape for the people of Israel. God worked things out according to His predetermined plan through both Moses and the Pharaoh (Exodus 9:13-17; Romans 9:16-18). We, however, are to be subject to our governing authorities. This is God's revealed will to us in this dispensation of grace, so we are in no position to rise up against our governing authorities as Moses did.

What About America?

According to this perspective, we should humbly consider our early American history. During the American revolution, George III, King of Great Britain and Ireland, was the supreme authority over the American colonies. Should believers have participated in the revolution against England? Not according to Scripture because revolution is the opposite of subjection. Nor does Scripture provide a supporting argument that believers should have fought for the British against their own friends and neighbors. They were under British authority and were to render what was due to them. Later, they were under American authority and were to render what was due to them. Rendering all that is due, however, has never included sinning at the request or direction of our government. Both governments were established by God and He used them for His purposes. It was not up to believers to decide for God what He was doing.

Leave Justice and Retribution to God

> **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:14-21)

It is hard to imagine anyone liking to be persecuted for anything. For many of us, being persecuted for our faith, or if we perceive that we are being persecuted for our faith, seems to be particularly onerous. What many of us do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that we should consider suffering for Christ as a blessing. Instead, oftentimes our first reaction is to fight back or seek justice. This response, however, is contrary to the above passage.

> **"Blessed are you when people insult** [revile] **you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me** [*Jesus*]**."** (Matthew 5:11)

It is not uncommon for American brethren to feel that our Christian rights are being taken away from us and that our government (at all levels) is persecuting us through various laws and ordinances. Is this really true? We need to understand what Scripture says about persecution and then determine whether our persecution is based on living in accordance with God's will, or if it is brought upon ourselves by our own thoughts and actions that are not scripturally sound (I Peter 4:15-16, 19). I will examine persecution and how God expects us to respond to it in Chapter 12.

Instead of seeking justice when we feel we have been wronged, we are exhorted to bless those who persecute us and respond to them with acts of goodness (Romans 12:20-21; I Thessalonians 5:15). God knows what is going on, and we are to leave justice and retribution to Him (Romans 12:17-19). Therefore, it not up to us, as believers, to stand up to our government and fight for our presumed Christian rights. We are citizens of heaven and aliens on this earth. This is an evil age and there are no godly governments—we only have worldly governments (Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-3).

Personal Thoughts

Background

How does a person apply these Scriptural truths in our day? As one who has lived through the times of the cold war (under the threat of nuclear war), the civil rights movement, multiple wars (e.g., Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan), and numerous other significant national and world events—both good and bad—I have developed my own thoughts as a believer regarding how I ought to respond to my own government and how to view the worldwide system of governments. I try to frame my response according to my understanding of Scripture and, frankly, some of my thoughts have changed over the years as my understanding has hopefully grown. Some of those changes occur by observing and evaluating how fellow believers respond to our government and these events. Are their responses supported by Scripture or do I need to differ from my fellow brethren regardless of the consequences to our friendship or fellowship?

The following points of view are presented for your consideration. They are not offered as judgment or for the sake of debate. I only ask that you evaluate them in accordance with Scripture from the perspective as being a member of the body of Christ.

Political Affiliation

Brethren, we are in the world but not of it (John 17:11-14; Romans 12:1-2; I Corinthians 3:18-23; Galatians 6:14; Philippians 3:20-21). All authority is of God or was brought into being by God, but no nation on earth is godly. Paul was a Jew *and* a Roman citizen by birth and used his heritage to his advantage to preach Christ, even to the highest authorities (including the King of Judea, Roman governors, and apparently the Caesar—Acts 24 – 26; 27:23-24; 28:19).

Even though he was a Roman citizen, Paul never said that the Roman government was good and should be supported beyond obedience to their laws. Nor did he say that it was bad and that the brethren should rise up together to make their voice heard to change how it governed. This was despite him being falsely imprisoned in Rome on at least two occasions and ultimately being put to death (II Timothy 4:6-8). It is good to remember that Paul's letter to the Philippian brethren, often considered to be the book of joy, was written while Paul was in a Roman prison (Philippians 1:7, 12-14).

Today, many brethren in America (as well as those who falsely profess to be Christians), believe they can and should influence their government and its laws. This is done through voting and by supporting Christian political interest groups and various candidates with their time and money. Is this really how God wants us to spend our time and money so graciously provided to us?

Think about it, brethren. Today, one could easily conclude (as emphasized by evangelical and conservative Christian organizations) that the only good Christian in America is a Republican. However, an unknown percentage of American brethren are registered as Democrats, Independents, other parties, or as unaffiliated voters. Further still, there are some brethren (perhaps a very small minority) who are not registered to vote or, if they are, choose not to vote for their governing authorities because they know God will put His choice into office to fulfill His purpose. Please do not judge those brethren who are in the latter category.

I voted as a registered Republican for the Republican candidate for president in the 1976 election (Gerald Ford)—it was the first time I was eligible to vote. At about the same time I was beginning to understand the magnitude of the sovereignty of God, though not yet realizing that He puts into power His choice regardless of a country's form of government (such things were not taught in the churches I attended). Soon afterward, I was heartbroken (as was my pastor who was unaware of the internal political strife—he never preached

about politics during the years I attended) when an exemplary couple in our church was ostracized by fellow church members and ended up leaving because it became known that they voted Democrat (for Jimmy Carter—a professing Christian—who won). I no longer wanted any political affiliation and stopped voting to fill positions of authority.

I did not vote again for a position of authority until 2020 when I voted as an unaffiliated voter against the incumbent president (Donald Trump). I did so not to affect the outcome but in support of those close to me. I did not want to be identified with the majority of Christians (most of whom identified themselves as evangelical or conservative Christians) who I was convinced were supporting an exceptionally arrogant, immoral, and blasphemous man who gladly accepted the worshipful adoration of his followers and who gave a self-serving pledge to champion so-called *Christian* causes. However, I still firmly believe that all who are in a position of political authority are in power by the will of God whether I vote or not. Consequently, I have returned to my post-1976 election conviction to not vote for positions of authority, acknowledging God's sovereign will and accepting the judgment of those who do not agree with my stand.

Patriotism—At What Cost?

Generally speaking, most of the concepts of America's guiding documents are good, and America has been the dream or destination of many people around the world who are oppressed in their native countries. However, is there really any spiritual justification for patriotism among believers? Should we pledge or vow to do anything and everything expected or demanded by our country? Should we involve ourselves in the political process of our country? According to my own observations, most American brethren would answer a resounding "Yes!" to these questions. Remember, however, that we are not of this world; instead, we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20-21). We were spiritually changed from death to life, so we are no longer considered by God to be citizens of this world (Ephesians 2:1-7).

With this in mind, does God expect us to give our oath of allegiance to an earthly institution? Think about the words of the Pledge of Allegiance the next time you recite it, with your hand over your heart. Is doing this a form of worship? I believe that it is. Please check *United States Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8(j)* where it is stated that our flag is "considered a living thing." Is this really something that God wants believers to do (I Corinthians 8:1-6; 10:14; II Corinthians 6:14-18)? Would you make the same type of national pledge regardless of the country in which you are a citizen? These are all important questions that every believer should ponder.

Even though we could look at many examples regarding the dangers of patriotism, please indulge me while I refer to Nazi Germany again. I use Nazi Germany as an example because it quickly went from a democracy to a dictatorship, and any country, regardless of their form of government, could become authoritarian like Nazi Germany.

During the 1932 federal democratic election, Hitler and his Nazi Party received the votes needed to become a partner in the German government. Hitler was appointed as Chancellor by President Hindenburg in 1933 and subsequently was able to convince the elected legislature of Germany to outlaw all other parties and to give him greater power than normal through the Enabling Act (among other things, he combined the positions of President and Chancellor). With Hindenburg's death in 1934, Hitler assumed the position of dictator, or Führer. It was not long before the majority of Germans looked upon him as their national savior. In truth, their oath and salute to him were forms of idol worship.

Based on the passage in Romans 13 and numerous examples throughout the Bible, the progression of events that put Hitler into power were in accordance with the sovereign will of God. For example, consider

the Pharoah in Moses' day (Exodus 9:12-17; Romans 9:17), King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 4:28-37), and King Sennacherib of Assyria (II Kings 19:8-37) who were in power and used by God for His purposes. Also, we already know that there will be specific evil people referred to as *the beast* and *the false prophet* in the future and that they will be in power to fulfill the prophecies of God regarding His judgment of the nations (Revelation 13:1-10; 19:20).

Even though God planned it all out, the people who voted Hitler into power, probably including some believers, were responsible for what followed. How is it possible that we can be held responsible for something God already planned to occur? Please carefully consider the following message by Peter to the men[3] of Israel at the time of Pentecost.

> **"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death."** (Acts 2:22-23)

As stated in this passage, Peter, through whom the Holy Spirit was speaking, held the people of Israel responsible and accountable for turning Jesus over to the Romans and for His crucifixion even though these events were in accordance with God's predestined plan (see also Matthew 27:24-26; Acts 4:27-28). Therefore, no one can say, "I am not responsible if God planned it to occur" (see also Romans 9:14-21).

The German citizens who voted for Hitler and his Nazi Party had no idea how things would turn out—that their government would be as destructive and as murderous as it was, and that Germany would be in ruins a little more than a decade later and then be split into two nations. In the meantime, most German citizens trusted Hitler and patriotically served and fought for him and the nation until total defeat in 1945.

If you were a German citizen and a believer during that time, what would you have done? Would you have been a good patriot and served Hitler's Germany, or would you have suffered the consequences for walking worthy of your salvation in Christ? What about if you were a believer and citizen of Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, etc.? Would you patriotically support or fight for your country's causes? American Christians should think about these things as they consider their own patriotism. This is not about being anti-government, for we are commanded by God to submit to our government as long as it is not forcing us to sin.[4]

Because we are to submit to our governing authorities, it is not up to us to participate in demonstrations or revolutions against our government. I believe it is a different matter to stand, through peaceful means, with or for family, friends, or neighbors who are suffering unjustly. As an example, Paul was saddened that no one among his fellow brethren came to his defense before the Roman authorities (II Timothy 4:16-17). *However*, we need to be very careful to avoid conforming with the world (Romans 12:1-2) or associating with, or standing for, activities or causes that are sinful or participating in demonstrations that become sinful through expressions of hatefulness or actions of violence or destruction.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves and consider their interests above our own, but God has not instructed us to try to change the world because it is ungodly and unable to obey God (Romans 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:12-14; II Corinthians 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-3). We are instructed, however, to live quiet lives (I Thessalonians 4:9-12) and to flee from sin and the appearance of evil (II Timothy 2:20-26; I Thessalonians

[3] Although it is likely that Jewish women and Gentile people witnessed the message by Peter and the other apostles, only the men were specifically addressed in accordance with the requirements of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).
[4] If reciting the Pledge of Allegiance became a law, then I would have to disobey it and accept the consequences.

5:21-22). We can do these things, and we can live according to the fruit of the Spirit, regardless of our government or its laws (Galatians 5:22-25).

Constitutional Rights and Christian Rights

All American believers have constitutional rights due to their citizenship. The United States Constitution, however, was not, and still is not, a perfect document. As noted earlier, the phrase *all men are created equal* in the Declaration of Independence did not actually mean *all people*. An equal rights amendment was not introduced in Congress until 1923 and was not passed by Congress until 1972. However, it still has not been fully ratified by the states and added to the Constitution.

American Christians often equate Christian rights with constitutional rights. Brethren, the Constitution most definitely is *not* a sacred document. It is the word of men and not the word of God. For one example of many, the clause for religious freedom in the first amendment is contrary to the first four commandments of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-11). Also, as noted earlier, just because the Constitution (and laws that enforce the Constitution) allows people to do certain things does not mean that we, as believers, should take advantage of all the rights afforded to us.

Brethren, I submit that believers do not have Christian rights. There are many things God wants us to do in our worship of Him and to walk worthy of our salvation in Christ. However, the Bible does not say that these things should or will be supported by the laws of man. If a law forbids us to pray to God or to worship Him, as happened to Daniel, then we would need to pray or worship in secret. If we were then exposed for breaking the law, then we would need to face the consequences of the law quietly and humbly as part of our suffering for Christ. We have no Scriptural justification for claiming, before the courts of man, that the laws are contrary to our right to pray to, or worship, God.

Some constitutional rights seem to be particularly precious to many Christians, and much effort and money are expended by Christian organizations and individual believers to ensure that these rights are upheld. We will look at some rights that I have found many fellow believers to be passionate about.

Freedom of Religion

Among other things, the 1st Amendment of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion and forbids the establishment of a national religion. It is a good thing that we do not have a national religion, because no nation would choose to worship according to the word of God in general or the gospel of grace in particular. It is also a good thing that members of the body of Christ can freely and openly worship in most parts of the country (this is discouraged or illegal in some Native American nations, tribes, and pueblos within America).

As mentioned earlier, however, this amendment provides the freedom to worship anyone or anything a person pleases. The Constitution does not give precedent or advantage to *Christianity*. Consequently, Christians have no constitutional right to assert our beliefs over those of anyone else. Furthermore, as noted earlier, to claim that we have the constitutional right to publicly pray or observe holidays in the way we choose opens the door for every religion to do so. There are countries that have national religions and restrict how people can worship. We should be thankful for the freedoms we have and not abuse them or act arrogantly.

Brethren, we need to remember that we are free in Christ regardless of our political circumstances. We do not need constitutional rights or provisions to believe the gospel of salvation, worship God, and live each day (walk worthy) in response to the gift of our salvation. There are no laws against living according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. If we suffer because we are living for Christ, we will not be the first

to do so. We must remember that God considers such suffering to be a blessing (Matthew 5:11; Philippians 1:27-30).

> **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** (Galatians 5:22-23)

Freedom of Speech

The 1st Amendment also provides for freedom of speech. For many Christians, this is tied to our freedom of religion. Any restriction (real or perceived) of our ability to publicly worship as we please is often considered to be a breach of our constitutional rights—our Christian rights. There is even a Christian college dedicated to training up Christian lawyers to fight for our Christian rights and to influence our judicial system and government in accordance with the laws of God. Again, where in Scripture does it say that we have Christian rights or that we have a responsibility to sue or fight for them? Scripture does say, however, that we are not to sue anyone (I Corinthians 6:1-11).

> **Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.** (I Corinthians 6:7-8)

It is not uncommon for Christian organizations, churches, and individual believers to speak out against certain sinful behaviors (or behaviors or actions perceived to be against the will of God) as an exercise of their freedom of speech. We must remember that all the exhortations in Scripture to live godly lives are written to children of God and not to the world (Romans 6:8-14; 12:1-2). No one can live, or even attempt to live, according to God's will without first being saved (Romans 8:5-8; I Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:12-14).

We are not here to change the sinful behaviors of nonbelievers but to represent Christ as His ambassadors. As an analogy, American ambassadors to foreign countries represent our government in those countries—they are not tasked with turning the citizens of those countries into Americans. Trying to change the behavior of nonbelievers exposes the extent of our own hypocrisy or ignorance. Please consider the following conjectural questions regarding ourselves, fellow brethren, and those who claim to be Christians:

- How many who try to overturn abortion laws have participated in premarital sex (fornication) or extramarital sex (adultery) or continue to do so, or whose immorality leads to an abortion?
- How many who try to prevent or overturn laws pertaining to homosexual rights have been sexually immoral in any way or continue to be immoral? Brethren, God abhors all sexual sin (Romans 1:24-27; 13:9; I Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20; Galatians 5:19; I Thessalonians 4:3-7). We should be thankful that God is forgiving and that we, in this dispensation of grace, are not under the penalties required by the Law of Moses (e.g., Leviticus 20:10-13).
- How many who try to prevent or overturn laws pertaining to legalization of behavior-altering drugs have abused drugs (illegal or prescription) or alcohol or continue to do so?
- How many who want laws to allow prayer in public schools or before athletic events or public meetings would want a person of a non-Christian religion to lead the prayer?
- How many who oppose vaccinations or health-related mandates for religious reasons (e.g., proclaiming *faith over fear*, they are protected by the Holy Spirit, etc.) have ever gone to a doctor, surgeon, dentist, or chiropractor, or used prescription or over-the-counter drugs or medications to reduce pain, get well, or prevent illness?
- How many who demand the death sentence for murder, because God required it in the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:13; 21:12), have wished that someone who wronged them was dead (see

Matthew 5:21-22)? Furthermore, have they done any of the other things that required punishment by death under the Law of Moses?

- How many who seek justice or retribution through the courts have sinned and been forgiven by God through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ?

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5)

Please consider another thought on freedom of speech. Perhaps because we have that freedom, we think that it is our right to tell crude jokes, use crass or vulgar language, or belittle or slander others (especially through social media). I have known nonbelieving friends and coworkers who are far more appropriate and considerate in their speech than many fellow believers. Brethren, is that how we should represent Christ as His ambassadors?

Let no unwholesome [corrupt] **word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:29-32)

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints [*believers*]**; and there must be no filthiness and silly** [foolish] **talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.** (Ephesians 5:3-4)

Right to Bear Arms

It seems that many Americans, including many believers, consider gun ownership the most important constitutional right (2nd Amendment)—perhaps even the most important *God-given* right. It is as though they would rather die than give up their guns, so they actively fight any legislation that would enact or potentially infer any restriction on gun ownership (none of which pertain to using a gun for hunting). Is this position supported by Scripture?

When Jesus told His disciples to obtain swords prior to His betrayal (Luke 22:35-38), I believe that He was testing them. Furthermore, I believe that they failed the test by obtaining two swords. If Jesus had meant for the disciples to have swords, then all of them should have obtained swords (Luke 22:36). However, after the disciples acquired two swords, Jesus said (*perhaps* sarcastically) that two were enough because, I believe, He was trying to teach them a lesson of faith. The people who came to arrest Jesus had swords and clubs, and yet He did not want or expect His disciples to defend Him against His captors (Luke 22:52-53).

Jesus answered [*Pontius Pilate*]**, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants** [*disciples*] **would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."** (John 18:36)

When Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest to protect Jesus, Jesus miraculously restored the person's ear (Luke 22:47-51; John 18:10-11). At the same time, Jesus said that those who live by the sword

will die by the sword (Matthew 26:51-54). Instead of obtaining the two swords, I believe the disciples should have recalled all the miracles performed by Jesus and acknowledged their trust in Him that everything would work out in accordance with God's plans. Through veiled and plain language Jesus had said He would be killed and would be raised from the dead (John 2:18-22; Matthew 16:21-22; 17:22-23; 26:31-32), and yet the disciples tried to stop that from happening.

Although we can discern and learn from the disciples' actions, we are in no position to condemn them for their actions because their eyes had not yet been opened to many of the truths taught to them by Jesus (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). We, on the other hand, have the completed word of God and the Holy Spirit to help us understand it; still, all understanding is by the grace of God and not by our own intelligence or wisdom (Ephesians 1:15-21; I Corinthians 2:6-13).

I want to follow up on the statement by Jesus that those who live by the sword will die by the sword from two perspectives. First, unlike during the Old Testament when God used the armies of Israel to conquer the land and defend the nation, God apparently will no longer use the men of Israel to fight His battles (Matthew 26:53; Revelation 13:10; 14:14-20; 19:11-21; 20:7-10). During the time of the great tribulation, when Satan's representative (referred to as *the beast*) rules the world and is worshiped by the world, the believing remnant of Israel will suffer persecution as never before seen. However, the believers will not fight back or defend themselves; instead, they will live by faith (Revelation 13:1-10). Brethren, similar to Israel's future, believers in this dispensation are not instructed to prepare for or fight God's battles.

And second, we are not instructed in Scripture to arm ourselves for protection. When the disciples were sent out to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus did not tell them to carry weapons—He would provide for them (Matthew 10:5-10). There is nothing in Scripture that says or implies that Paul carried a weapon or instructed his coworkers to do so, even though nonbelieving Jews actively tried to kill Paul (Acts 9:23-25; 14:2-7, 19). Paul and other apostles and their coworkers died at the hands of God's enemies (II Timothy 4:6-7; II Peter 1:12-15; Acts 7:54-60). Many believers who stood for Christ were persecuted, including being put to death, by their own countrymen (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11; I Thessalonians 2:14-16). Would it have turned out differently if they had armed and defended themselves? No. Would they have been relying on the strength and will of God if they had done so? No.

Many people, including believers, arm themselves (often excessively) to protect themselves and their families against *the government* (i.e., government oppression, whether real or perceived). They forget that our government consists of our police forces and all the military services that are composed of fellow Americans who are well-armed and highly trained to kill. If our governing authority turns against its citizens, a few guns are not going to protect us if we try to fight back. Furthermore, we need to remember that we, as believers, are not to rebel against our government.

Men are responsible for taking care of their families (I Timothy 5:8), and we are to love one another and live quiet lives (I Thessalonians 4:9-12). Does that mean or imply armed protection? No. We have far too many examples of guns in households that end up being used, accidently or intentionally, in the injury or death of family members. Also, using a gun for protection will usually end badly (Matthew 26:52).

Some people live in areas of excessive crime out of no choice of their own. A man should carefully consider whether he should expose his wife and children to a life of likely violence. If he has no choice but to live in such a place, he should do so by faith and not according to his own strength. I believe that the same principle applies to women who live alone. I have been told (judgmentally and abusively) by fellow brethren that this position is unrealistic, irresponsible, and ignorant; however, my desire is to live in accordance with the word and will of God.

Instead of arming ourselves for our protection, we should leave guns in the hands of law enforcement and the military. We should, for our part, put on the armor of God and rely on His strength.

> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength** [power] **of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist** [withstand] **in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Additionally, instead of arming ourselves for protection, we should believe what God has revealed to us through His word:

- All things work out for good for those who belong to God (Romans 8:28-30). This is God's long-term plan and promise for us, and we are likely to experience difficult times and situations along the way.
- God began a good work in us and will complete it (Philippians 1:6).
- God is accomplishing His will through us (Philippians 2:12-13).
- We will be persecuted if we live for Christ (II Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29-30).
- We are to live by faith (Romans 1:16-17; I Corinthians 2:3-5).
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).

Governing Authority Summarized

Hopefully this chapter has demonstrated, through scriptural support, that all those in governing authority are in their positions by the sovereign will of God and that He will use them for His purposes—whether for honorable use or dishonorable use. He expects (commands) us to be subject to those in authority and to obey the laws of our government, except in cases where specific laws are contrary to the will of God and force us to sin.

American believers, as with all American citizens, have constitutional rights; however, there are some rights that we should not exercise because to do so would be sinning against God. We do not have Christian rights to claim or fight for, however, because we are citizens of heaven.

Instead of claiming persecution and demanding justice if we feel we are wronged for living or standing truthfully for our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ, we should expect to suffer persecution and count it as a blessing. We are not to fight back through lawsuits or active resistance. God wants us to bless those who persecute us and show kindness to our enemies. After all, He demonstrated this principle by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins even though we were His enemies.

How are we, as members of the body of Christ, responding to God's commands regarding governmental authority? In general, I believe we are doing poorly and are bringing dishonor to God and our Lord. In response to God's forgiveness and gift of salvation, He wants us to walk in such a manner that is befitting our salvation and as Christ's ambassadors.

Chapter 11

Our Motivation for Walking Worthy

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Are Rewards Our Goal?

In the previous six chapters we have studied how God expects us to behave as His children. We have focused primarily on exhortations about how we should conduct our day-to-day walk as believers, but many of those exhortations are directly contrasted to conduct we should avoid. We have also seen that the exhortations are not mere suggestions that God is hoping we will consider but are commands that we are to obey.

Perhaps it is a bit surprising how thoroughly Scripture reveals and explains God's expectations for us. But what is our motivation for trying to obey God and walking worthy of our salvation? It is our nature to expect something in return for our efforts. From my earliest remembrances from my youth on through my adult life, I heard from pastors and teachers, and read in books, that if I work hard for God then I can expect rewards and crowns when my works are judged by God or Christ. I may be over simplifying things, but this seemed to be the primary motivation for serving God. At some point, likely after beginning to grasp the meaning of God's grace in my early twenties, I began to question this motivation. What does Scripture say?

We love recognition for our efforts. Rewards and awards are a means to celebrate our accomplishments and often motivate us to excel in our endeavors. In school (academics and athletics), sports, entertainment, and on the job, there is recognition for being the best and sometimes for coming in second or third place. In some cases, especially in sports and entertainment, substantial monetary rewards accompany the recognition. It seems that nearly every activity in life has been turned into a competition. It is who we are. Winning is something that a person (or a team) can be proud of and boast about. But where does pride and boasting fit into God's plan for us?

What if trying to be successful in our endeavors goes unrecognized by our peers? Perhaps we are even ridiculed by others for doing so because of their jealousy or contempt for us. Is it worthwhile to do the right thing, and do it to the best of our ability, simply because it is the right thing to do? Is there reward in that?

As believers, many of us have been taught that if we are obedient to God and do good works that we will receive rewards and crowns for our efforts at the judgment seat of Christ. Furthermore, some teach that if our works exceed those of other believers, we will attain greater positions in heaven than our lesser-performing brethren. As an extension of this thought, some believe that positions in heaven also vary in importance based on our level of understanding of Scripture (i.e., those who studied more will have higher positions than those who did not study as much). Therefore, rewards are a motivation, and sometimes the primary motivation, to do good works or diligently study the word of God. Are rewards our goal?

Before getting into the details of judgment and rewards, I admit that I am not certain regarding my conclusions. I do not presume to know and understand all the things that God has in store for us. However, this chapter provides an examination of verses and passages related to God's judgments of individuals and my understanding of what they mean. I leave it to you to prayerfully read and consider the Scripture passages (and their context) and my associated conclusions, thus leaving your understanding between you and God.

Prepared for Good Works

For some who truly believe the gospel of salvation, salvation is treated like *fire insurance*. They know that their sins are forgiven and that they (their soul and spirit) will ascend into heaven upon physical death (thus avoiding the eternal fire of hell—Revelation 20:11-15), but they live as if they were not believers. In other words, they continue to live sinful lives as they did before they were saved.

Brethren, we should never put the grace of God to the test by proving how forgiving He is through living purposely sinful lives (Romans 6:1-2). Instead, we should be thankful for the forgiveness we have through Christ's death for us and live our lives in a manner that is worthy of our salvation. When we are saved, we are in Christ and are His ambassadors (representatives) on earth. Are we properly representing Him?

To walk, or live, worthy of our salvation involves many things, both in attitude and actions. A proper attitude includes living and demonstrating a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit), considering others as being more important than ourselves, and being forgiving to those who hurt us. Proper actions include doing good works to help other people.

> **Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith** [*fellow believers*]**.** (Galatians 6:9-10)

> **See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another** [*fellow believers*] **and for all people.** (I Thessalonians 5:15)

> **This is a trustworthy** [faithful] **statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.** (Titus 3:8)

At the moment of our salvation, God made us as new creations in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). He did so to perform His good works that He prepared for us to do. As we will see, it is true that the works of all people, including believers, will be judged. In what way will our works be judged, and what will the consequences be?

> **For we** [*believers*] **are His** [*God's*] **workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:10)

Judgment

There are two future judgments of individuals described in Scripture and, I believe, Christ is the judge at both. One of the judgments applies only to believers—those who have been saved by the grace of God. The other one, which we will briefly address first, applies to nonbelievers.

The Great White Throne Judgment

At the close of the prophesied 1,000-year reign of Christ in His kingdom, after He has totally defeated Satan and the nations outside of new Jerusalem (Revelation 20:7-10), the dead—those of all ages (dispensations) who died apart from God—will be raised up and will be judged by a judge sitting on a great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15). This resurrection is referred to in Scripture as *the resurrection of judgment* or *damnation* depending on the Bible version (John 5:28-29; 12:48; Revelation 20:5), and is distinguished from the prophesied *first resurrection* of kingdom believers who will have been raised 1,000 years earlier to enter the messianic kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6; John 11:24-26). This judgment is often referred to by Christians as

the *Great White Throne Judgment*, and the result is called *the second death* (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). Brethren, we will not be judged at this judgment.

> **Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne** [God]**, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades** [hell] **gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades** [hell] **were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20:11-15)

Upon physical death—the first death—the souls of all nonbelievers (all who are not saved by the grace of God) descend into hell, which is called *Sheol* in Hebrew (Numbers 16:25-35; Psalm 9:17) and *Hades* in Greek (Matthew 11:20-24), where they await judgment for their sin. It is a place of torment (Luke 16:19-31). These dead will be raised up for final judgment before the great white throne. They will be judged according to what is *written in the books* and *all* will be found guilty with no chance of reprieve. I believe that the books refer to the books of the Law of Moses, which show that everyone is guilty of sin (John 5:45-47; Romans 3:19-20). This second death is a total spiritual death—condemnation for their sin—and *all* will be cast into the lake of fire (referred to by some as *Gehenna*,[1] which is derived from the Greek word *ge-enna*—Matthew 5:22, 29-30) where they will be eternally tormented along with Satan and his *beast* and *false prophet* who led and deceived the Gentile nations[2] (Revelation 19:19-20; 20:7-10; 21:8).

The One sitting on the great white throne is not clearly identified in Revelation 20:11. Some believe that God the Father is the judge on the throne. In the KJV, Revelation 20:12 says that the dead will *stand before God*, whereas the NASB and several other modern translations say they are standing *before the throne*. I believe that they will stand before the throne of God that is occupied by Christ; that is, they will be judged by Christ.

It is true that God the Father is the ultimate judge because of His sovereignty (Hebrews 12:23), but it appears likely that Christ is the judge who will sit on the great white throne. Although Jesus came into the world to save it and not judge it (John 12:44-47), He was rejected by His people and the world (Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28). Upon reacquiring His rightful position in heaven after His ascension (Ephesians 1:18-21; Colossians 3:1), we are told that our Lord Jesus Christ is the judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; II Timothy 4:1; I Peter 4:3-5). Furthermore, we are told through Paul that God will judge the world in righteousness *through* the Man that He raised from the dead, which would make Christ the in-person judge—God's representative.

> **"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man** [*Christ*] **whom He has appointed** [ordained]**, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."** (Acts 17:30-31)

> **For when Gentiles who do not have the Law** [*of Moses*] **do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending**

[1] An explanation of Gehenna is offered in *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.
[2] A brief explanation of these future men of Satan is provided in Appendix C.

[excusing] **them, on the day when, according to my** [*Paul's*] **gospel,**[3] **God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.** (Romans 2:14-16)

These passages do not specifically say that they are referring to the judgment at the great white throne, but I believe they are. They are explaining that all nonbelievers, whether Jews or Gentiles, will be judged according to the righteousness of the Law of Moses that explains sin and that they will be without excuse—they will be condemned in their sin (Romans 1:28-32; 3:9-20; Revelation 20:11-12). These passages, however, affirm that God has appointed His Son to be Judge. In fact, God the Father has given (authorized or appointed) all judgment to His Son Jesus Christ (John 5:19-30).

"And He [*Christ*] **ordered us** [*apostles*] **to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead."** (Acts 10:42)

Brethren, God has revealed why and how He will judge, through Christ, everyone who is not saved by the grace of God. This knowledge ought to be very humbling for every believer—every child of God. Even though we continue to sin because we still have a sin nature, we will not face or endure this judgment because God has forgiven our sins and considers us to be righteous in Christ the moment that we believe that Christ paid our penalty—that He died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead (Romans 8:1-4). Because God will judge nonbelievers for their sins, how could we possibly think that it is acceptable to intentionally live sinful lives and continue in the very sins that will send all nonbelievers to the lake of fire (I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:5-11)?

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase [abound]**? May it never be** [God forbid]**! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** (Romans 6:1-2)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But [*sexual*] **immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints** [*believers*]**; and there must be no filthiness and silly** [foolish] **talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty** [vain] **words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.** (Ephesians 5:1-8)

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Apostle Paul, and only Paul, spoke of the judgment seat of Christ. He specifically mentions it in the following two passages.

Therefore we [*believers*] **also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him** [*God*[4]]**. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.** (II Corinthians 5:9-10)

[3] The gospel of the grace of God according to the revelation of the mystery (Acts 20:24; Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-12).

[4] Our desire should be to please God as faithful bond-servants of Christ (Galatians 1:10; I Thessalonians 2:4; 4:1).

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God [Christ[5]]**. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.** (Romans 14:10-12)

There are two other passages, provided below, that appear to be describing the judgment of seat of Christ but do not directly call it as such. Furthermore, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ mentioned by Paul several times *might* be another name for the judgment seat of Christ (I Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; II Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6; 2:16).

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (I Corinthians 3:10-15)

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy [faithful]**. But to me** [*Paul*] **it is a very small thing that I may be examined** [judged] **by you, or by any human court** [man's judgment]**; in fact, I do not even examine** [judge] **myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted** [justified]**; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.** (I Corinthians 4:1-5)

What can we learn from these passages?

- We will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.
- Each one of us will give an account of ourself to God (through Christ).
- Each one of us will be recompensed for our deeds in the body, according to what we have done, whether good or bad.
- Our works built on the foundation of Christ will be tested by fire to determine their quality.
  - If any of our works remain, we will receive a reward.
  - If any of our works burn up, we will suffer loss but still be saved.
- The motives of our heart in the performance of our service to God will be revealed, and we will receive praise, as appropriate, from God (through Christ).

Please note that these passages do not say that we will be judged for our sins. This is because our sins were forgiven by God when we believed the gospel of salvation (Romans 3:23-26; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32). At that moment we were justified, glorified, and made righteous in Christ—God sees us in Christ (Romans 4:5; 4:23 – 5:11; 8:29-30; Ephesians 2:4-6). However, because good works can be motivated by sinful desires (e.g., desired recognition, self-serving ambition, pride, monetary gain, etc.), *perhaps* our sin nature, which will have been removed by the time we stand before the judgment seat (I Corinthians 15:50-53;

[5] Only nonbelievers will stand before the judgment of God (through Christ) at the great white throne. Therefore, I believe that the KJV translation of *the judgment seat of Christ* in this verse is correct because Paul was writing to believers.

Philippians 3:20-21), may be identified as the source of our sinful motives. This is speculation, but it is true that we should examine our motives in the things we do in the name of God and our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 11:27-32; II Corinthians 13:4-5; Philippians 1:15-17; Colossians 3:23-25). Something that is missing from these passages are descriptions of rewards. What can we expect?

As mentioned above, Paul is the only one to describe the judgment seat of Christ. His letters were written to the believers who were established through the gospel of the grace of God that Paul was appointed by God and Christ to proclaim. Therefore, his letters apply directly to us, too. Consequently, members of the body of Christ, in which all believers in this dispensation of grace belong, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

When will we face the judgment seat of Christ? Will it be a specific day in the timetable of God? Scripture does not provide a concise answer. It is true that I Corinthians 3:13 says that *the day will show (declare) it*, but is it referring to a specific time that all believers will stand before Christ or is it referring to whatever time each of us stands before it? I do not believe that it matters either way. We do know that when we are absent from the body (at the moment of our physical death) we are present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-8). We are also told that, at the rapture, the dead in Christ will be raised up and that they, as well as those who are still alive and caught up at the time of His return for us, will be changed from a body of flesh to a body of the glory of Christ (I Corinthians 15:50-53; I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Philippians 3:20-21).

Our concept of time is far different than that of God's (II Peter 3:8). However, it would seem strange to think that we would carry along works motivated by pride in the presence of God. Would believers who died a couple of thousand years ago still be waiting to have their works and motives judged? It does not seem likely, so perhaps each of us will have our works judged at the time we die (but, again, time is different to God than it is to us). This is conjecture, though, and it is best if we simply acknowledge that God will accomplish all things exactly as He has planned.

Rewards Described

As we have seen, we are exhorted to do good works. For what purpose are we to do them? Can we expect to be rewarded for our good works? If so, can we expect them now or later? Also, what kinds of rewards can we expect? Are we getting crowns? Finally, should we do good works so that we will be rewarded?

Because Paul was the only one to speak of the judgment seat of Christ, we will look at what he said regarding rewards. According to I Corinthians 3:10-15, each person's work on the foundation of Christ (our works for the Lord) will become evident because it will be tested with (as though by) fire. If *any* work remains, the person will receive *a reward*. If *any* work is burned up, he will suffer loss but remain saved. This passage does not refer to multiple rewards, or that more rewards will result in a greater position in heaven. In fact, the word *rewards* does not occur in the New Testament.[6]

To determine what kind of reward Paul referred to, we need to understand how the word *reward* was used in his letters. Furthermore, we need to look at words that are considered by many to be included as part of our reward or perhaps in addition to our reward. Such words are *crown*, *prize*, *praise*, and *reign* (i.e., reign with Christ). The Greek words from which these words are derived are obtained from *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, and their associated definitions (based on how the words were translated) are abbreviated from *Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. The reference or identification number associated with each Greek word (enclosed in parentheses) corresponds to both

[6] Within the KJV and NASB, the word *rewards* is only used in Numbers 22:7, Isaiah 1:23, Daniel 2:6, Daniel 5:17, and Hosea 2:12, and has nothing to do with service to God.

concordances (as well as the *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*) and are provided for your convenience should you decide to look them up.

Please bear with me as I go into some detail on these words. Although I use this method in developing many of my studies, I do not always provide this level of detail in my completed articles. I do so in this case to address the teaching I have heard over the decades regarding rewards to try to understand this subject from a scriptural perspective, and to proactively answer the question, "But what about *such and such* verse?" I learned a great deal in my investigation, and I pray that it will be useful to you, too.

Verses or passages in Paul's letters for each Greek word are provided below and are quoted from the NASB. The English translations of the Greek words are in bold italics; if a different word is used in the KJV, it follows the NASB word in brackets. Each quoted verse or passage is followed by an explanation of how the word is being used. Additional references from the New Testament are also incorporated as appropriate to provide a fuller understanding of the uses of these words.

Reward

misthos (3408): pay for service (literally or figuratively), whether good or bad; hire, reward, wages

> **Now to the one who works, his *wage*** [reward] **is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.** (Romans 4:4)

If we could earn righteousness or salvation through works, then our reward would not be reckoned as by grace but as what is due to us. That is, God would owe salvation to us just as an employer owes wages to his or her employees for their work. However, we cannot earn salvation—it is by grace through faith apart from works (Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9).

> **I** [*Paul*] **planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own *reward* according to his own labor.** (I Corinthians 3:6-8)

The context for this passage is about Paul chastising the Corinthian brethren for their foolishness in aligning themselves with men (instead of giving the credit to God for their growth), just as we do with our denominations and pastors today (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-5). It is possible that the reward spoken of here refers to some unspecified spiritual reward or praise that Paul and Apollos would receive for their service to God (see the next passage). However, based on the context, it could also simply refer to the intangible reward of willingly (voluntarily) serving the Corinthian brethren without charge (I Corinthians 9:16-18), or possibly (though doubtful) to the wages that the Corinthian brethren should have been providing to these men for their service to them (I Timothy 5:17-18).

> **According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw** [stubble]**, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a *reward*. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** (I Corinthians 3:10-15)

This is a key passage when considering rewards, but first note that it refers to a *reward* and not to *rewards*. The most common interpretation of this passage is that, when tested by fire, our good works (gold, silver, and precious stones) will remain, while our bad works (wood, hay, and straw) will burn up. Consequently, it is often taught that we will receive rewards for our good works.

This is what I was taught and believed for much of my adult life. However, the context of this passage suggests another possible interpretation for your consideration. My wife, Linda, and I were discussing rewards one day, likely in response to a recent lesson I had conducted. She questioned the good and bad works explanation and suggested that maybe the passage refers to all our works (i.e., what we thought were good or bad) and that all of them would be burned up. That is, maybe there would be no rewards for any of *our* works. I was skeptical about her suggestion but could not provide a defendable response. Therefore, it was time to search Scripture.

Paul begins this letter to the Corinthian brethren chastising them for their pride—their arrogance. In fact, this is a theme throughout the letter, for their pride was the root of all their fleshly (carnal) behaviors (e.g., I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4; 4:6-10; 5:1-6; etc.). Paul differentiated between man's work and God's work, who causes our spiritual growth, in the verses before this passage (I Corinthians 3:5-9). Therefore, who should receive the praise for the good works that build on the foundation of Christ? Us, whose works are through our own efforts (i.e., each man's work), or God, who performed them through us (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; Ephesians 2:8-10)? I believe that it is God who should receive the praise.

Furthermore, we are told that our faith is even more precious than gold, which is consumed by fire (I Peter 1:6-9). Yes, even gold, silver, and precious stones change into their vapor phases at specific temperatures—by all appearances they are consumed by fire. Perhaps, then, this passage is a lesson to the Corinthian brethren (and us), that all our self-motivated works for our Lord, regardless of how good we think they are (i.e., gold, silver, and precious stones), will be consumed. This will be the ultimate proof to us that we are saved by the grace of God apart from any works of our own. What is left by this testing of fire? *Perhaps* the works that God accomplished through us will be revealed to us, for which we will praise Him. This will leave absolutely no room for boasting on our part (or comparison to other brethren), except to boast in the Lord (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

> **For if I** [*Paul*] **preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a *reward*; but if against my will, I have a stewardship** [dispensation of the gospel] **entrusted to me. What then is my *reward*? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.** (I Corinthians 9:16-18)

Paul was chosen to preach the gospel of the grace of God, and he understood that God would accomplish His will through him whether he wanted to or not. However, by doing so willingly (voluntarily, because he wanted to) Paul had a reward. His reward was offering the gospel without charge; he did so without thought of personal gain (see I Corinthians 9:6-15 and I Timothy 6:3-6). Not only is this not usually considered to be a reward, this passage does not imply a future reward for Paul's work. Paul was experiencing this reward as he served the Corinthians and other brethren. We, too, should consider our service to God as a reward in itself.

> **The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching** [labor in the word and doctrine]**. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his *wages*** [reward]**."** (I Timothy 5:17-18)

Paul was not always paid or otherwise supported by those to whom he ministered the word of God (Philippians 4:15-18), and he referred to working other jobs to support himself (Acts 18:1-3; I Corinthians 4:12). He did this not only to avoid being a financial burden to those he ministered to, but also as an example for all believers that we should work to support our families (I Thessalonians 2:9-12; 4:9-12; I Timothy 5:8). However, as the above passage says, those who are ministered to should pay (or at least offer to pay or compensate for by some means) those doing the preaching and teaching. Those who labor well in the spiritual needs of others are worthy of their wages (I Corinthians 9:11-14; Galatians 6:6). This passage, therefore, refers to payment by those who are being served, and not to a future reward.

In the KJV, the Greek word *misthos* is also translated as *reward* in the following passages: Matthew 5:12, 46; 6:1-2, 5, 16; 10:41-42; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:23, 35; Acts 1:18; II Peter 2:13; II John 1:8; Jude 1:11; and Revelation 11:18; 22:12. Except for Acts 1:18, which refers to Judas' reward or price for his wickedness (his death), the context associated with these verses refer to conditions in the great tribulation and the kingdom of heaven. The hypocritical and evil men will receive their reward (judgment—death), and those who are faithful and righteous will receive their reward. The reward of the faithful appears to be realizing their promised eternal life by entering and residing in the kingdom; no type of specific reward is mentioned. None of these verses apply to us in this dispensation of grace because we have a heavenly hope and not an earthly hope as the kingdom believers had and will have. The word *misthos* is also translated in the KJV as *hire* (i.e., wages or pay) in Matthew 20:8, Luke 10:7, and James 5:4, and as *wages* in John 4:36 and II Peter 2:15.

katabrabūo (2603): to award the price against, i.e., figuratively to defraud

> **Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival** [holyday] **or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep *defrauding*** [*judging*] ***you of your prize*** [reward] **by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen** [*i.e., figments of his imagination*]**, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.** (Colossians 2:16-18)

This is the only passage in which this Greek word is used. In this passage and its context (Colossians 2:6-15), we are urged to not lose sight of, or our strength in, our completeness in Christ—our reward or prize—apart from the Law of Moses or any system of works as those around us (brethren and nonbelievers) judge us otherwise. This passage is not about losing a future reward for our works.

antapodosis (469): requital; reward

> **Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the *reward* of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.** (Colossians 3:23-25)

This is the only passage in which this Greek word is used. We should do all things for the Lord rather than for men (Colossians 3:17), *knowing* that we will receive the *reward of the inheritance*. We have already inherited all things in Christ (based on nothing we have done—Ephesians 1:3-14, 18). When we believe the gospel of salvation we are saved from the consequences of our sins—we inherit salvation in Christ and God's righteousness through Him (Acts 26:15-18; Hebrews 1:14; Romans 3:21-26; 5:18-21; I Corinthians 1:30; II Corinthians 5:21). The reward, or outcome, of our salvation is eternal life (Romans 6:22-23; Titus 3:5-7). Therefore, all believers will receive this reward of eternal life, which *may* be equivalent to the crown of righteousness as proposed in the next section.

If we do our work for men (to please them—Galatians 1:10), we will receive the consequences. This appears to refer to discipline from God during our earthly lives (Galatians 6:7-9; Hebrews 12:5-11). The goal is to work for the Lord (to walk worthy of our salvation) and not the reward itself that we will obtain regardless of our works or walk.

apodidōmi (591): deliver, give, pay or repay, perform, recompense, render, requite, restore, reward, sell, yield

> **But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will *render* to each person according to his deeds.** (Romans 2:5-6)

From Romans 1:18 through Romans 3:20; we learn that all people are unrighteous and separated from God. Furthermore, we are all without excuse, even the people of Israel who were chosen by God to be His people but who rejected or corrupted the Law of Moses. Based on the context, therefore, the *rendering* in this passage is referring to the final judgment of all who died without Christ—they will be judged for their deeds, which were all motivated by, or emanated from, their sin nature (Revelation 20:11-15). Beginning in Romans 3:21, we find out the remedy for mankind's hopeless condition: Christ died for our sins.

> **For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure** [*death*] **has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will *award*** [give] **to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.** (II Timothy 4:6-8)

When Paul wrote his last letter to his beloved coworker Timothy, he was in a prison in Rome and knew that he would soon be put to death. He was at peace knowing that he had faithfully served our Lord. Furthermore, he was looking forward to receiving the crown of righteousness from our Lord, apparently at the judgment seat of Christ. This passage does not imply that Paul earned this crown through his works, because he said that all believers will receive it.

How is it possible that *anyone* could receive this crown, since no believers, because of our sin nature, righteously serve our Lord? Even Paul admitted his own sinfulness (Romans 7:14-25). All members of the body of Christ will receive it because God already considers us to be righteous in Christ (Romans 4:5; 8:9-10)—no believer is more righteous than another believer. Although we continue to sin while in our bodies, we will attain (realize) our full righteousness when we are present with Christ, whether through death or the rapture (Philippians 1:6; 3:20-21).

It is possible that the crown of righteousness is equivalent to eternal life in Christ—they *may* be two names for the same thing. All those who believe that Christ died for our sins are considered by God to be alive in Christ and righteous in Christ. Consequently, we will inherit eternal life and righteousness in Christ at the time of our physical death or the rapture, whichever comes first. In this sense, therefore, eternal life can be considered a reward—that which we can look forward to without any doubt because of what Christ accomplished for us at the cross.

> **Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm** [evil]**; the Lord will *repay*** [reward] **him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.** (II Timothy 4:14-15)

Alexander apparently was a nonbeliever, perhaps falsely claiming to be a believer, who was serving Satan's purposes by actively opposing Paul and his message (I Timothy 1:18-20). However, as we too often

see today, he could have been a believer who opposed the truth of Paul's message of grace and, therefore, was unwittingly serving Satan's purposes (I Timothy 3:7; II Timothy 2:23-26). Regardless, Paul knew that our Lord would repay him for his deeds. If Alexander was a believer, he would have been disciplined in some measure during his life (Galatians 6:7-8; Hebrews 12:4-11); if a nonbeliever, he would receive his *reward* at the great white throne judgment (Romans 12:19).

There are many more references where this Greek word is used, most of which do not refer to any type of judgment. Passages outside of Paul's letters that do use this word regarding future payment (judgment) or reward include: Matthew 6:4, 6, 18; 12:36; 16:27; I Peter 4:5; and Revelation 22:12. These verses do not refer to the judgment seat of Christ, but I will leave it up to you to read them.

misthapodosia (3405): requital (good or bad); recompense of reward

This word appears only in the following verses: Hebrews 2:2; 10:35; and 11:26. In these verses, written to the kingdom believers of Israel, it refers to the just penalty for sin and the reward of eternal life. These verses do not refer to the judgment seat of Christ. However, all nonbelievers of all ages (throughout time or all dispensations) will receive the just penalty for sin, and all believers of all ages will receive eternal life.

axios (514): deserving, comparable or suitable; due reward, worthy or unworthy

In the KJV, this word is translated as *due reward* in Luke 23:41, where the repentant criminal on the cross recognized that he and the other criminal were receiving what they deserved. In no other instances is it translated as *reward*, but as something to do with being worthy. Only in Revelation 16:6 is this word used in relation to judgment, where it refers to the unrighteous people deserving judgment during the great tribulation.

Crown

stephanos (4735): a wreath as a badge of royalty, a prize or a symbol of honor; crown

> **Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable *wreath*** [crown]**, but we an imperishable** [incorruptible]**. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.** (I Corinthians 9:24-27)

In the days of the Greek games, the winning athlete would receive as the prize a crown-like wreath that would soon dry up and be worthless. In this passage, Paul said that we would receive an imperishable (incorruptible) wreath, which figuratively is contrasted to the athlete's wreath that is perishable. He did not say that we would receive it if we out-performed our fellow brethren, and he did not say that we would receive more than one. Brethren, all believers will receive this crown. We have already *won* because we are in Christ. Nowhere in Scripture, however, is this crown described; although, or because, it is imperishable, it may be something figurative or symbolic (representative) with no physical properties, such as a blessing.

Our race is how we live as believers. We are exhorted to walk worthy of our salvation and to stand fast in the truth of God's word, always abounding in the work of the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58; 16:13-14; Ephesians 6:10-17; Colossians 3:17, 23-24). *Because* we will receive this crown, it should be our desire and goal to apply the same level of focus and discipline in our daily walk that an athlete exercises to win a competition.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [*death*] **has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the *crown* of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award** [give] **to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.** (II Timothy 4:6-8)

The *crown of righteousness* has already been briefly addressed under *reward*. This crown appears to be the same as the *imperishable crown* referred to in I Corinthians 9:24-27, and the *reward of the inheritance* in Colossians 3:23-24. Paul knew that he would receive the crown of righteousness, and he exhorted us to do all things for the Lord rather than for men, *knowing* that we will receive the reward of the inheritance. Like Paul, we, too, should fight the good fight of faith. We should serve the Lord as a soldier who devotedly serves his or her commander, as the winning athlete who competes honorably (according to the rules), and as a farmer who deserves to receive the first share of his crops through hard work (II Timothy 2:1-6).

Again, and contrary to popular teaching, this crown is *not* something we can earn. We do not and cannot earn our righteousness—it is only through the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are never exhorted to out-perform our fellow brethren to win or gain something more than them. Because of our sin nature, trying to do so would only lead to pride, boasting, and associated sins (Romans 12:3, 16). Unfortunately, the believers of today, in general, have the same problems with pride as did the Corinthian brethren.

Finally, is the crown of righteousness something of substance or physical? It is difficult to picture all of us wearing a physical crown in heaven, considering that all believers have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6) and that all of us have been made righteous in Christ. As mentioned earlier, the crown of righteousness may simply be a descriptive name for eternal life—they may be one and the same. We could not have eternal life without being made righteous in Christ by the working of God (Romans 5:20-21; 6:20-23; Titus 3:5-7).

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and *crown*, in this way stand firm [fast] **in the Lord, my beloved**. (Philippians 4:1)

Because of their faithfulness (Philippians 1:3-8), the Philippian brethren were Paul's joy and crown. Just as *joy* is not something of substance, neither is *crown* in this context. *Crown* was being used as a figurative symbol of honor—the Philippian believers were evidence of the effectiveness of the gospel preached by Paul. He was so thankful to God for the Philippians that Paul was referring to a blessing he was experiencing at the time and was not implying any future reward in this specific instance.

For who is our hope or joy or *crown* of exultation [rejoicing]**? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.** (I Thessalonians 2:19-20)

As with the Philippians, the Thessalonian brethren were also considered by Paul to be his joy and crown. Paul was thankful to God for their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 1:2-4). Through their faithfulness, they were not only good examples for other brethren, but they also suffered severe persecution for their faith (I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:14-15). Besides being a blessing to Paul at the time, it appears that he knew that the Thessalonian brethren would also be a blessing to him when all believers are gathered in the Lord at the time of the rapture. This passage does not say that Paul will receive a reward or crown at the rapture, and it is not talking about the judgment seat of Christ. In this sense, Paul considered the Thessalonian brethren to be his current and future blessing. It is most likely that Paul considered his faithful coworkers in the same way, as well as other brethren who remained faithful in their walk and service to our Lord.

These are the only references to crown in Paul's epistles. Therefore, as pertains to a reward we will receive, we can be assured that we will receive the imperishable crown of righteousness—the reward of our inheritance—that appears to be referring to eternal life. However, there are other crowns mentioned in Scripture regarding rewards. Can we look forward to receiving them?

The *crown of life* is mentioned in James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10. As with righteousness, all brethren are alive in Christ, so one could conclude that we will receive the crown of life, also. However, though possible, the context of these passages implies otherwise.

> **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial** [endureth temptation]**; for once he has been approved, he will receive the *crown of life* which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.** (James 1:12)

> **"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life** [*i.e., Christ*]**, says this: 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested** [tried]**, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the** [a] ***crown of life*.'"** (Revelation 2:8-10)

Both of these passages refer to the time of the great tribulation. During that time, which will be after the rapture, all the believers will be believing Jews and Jewish proselytes who will be controlled by the Holy Spirit (see Appendix C). Their salvation in Christ—their coming Messiah and King—will be proven by their works (James 2:18-26; I John 3:4-10; 5:18-20; see also Ezekiel 36:22-28). For clarification, they will not be saved by their works, but their works will be proof that they are saved. Also, during that time, Satan, through his representative *the beast* (a king—Daniel 7:15-27) and *false prophet* (an antichrist—I John 2:18), will severely persecute and wage war against the people of Israel.

Many of the believers of the children of Israel—none of whom will wear the mark of the beast—will be put to death for their allegiance to God instead of to Satan and his representative. It is those who will be put to death for their faith who are promised to receive the crown of life. *Perhaps* all the believers during the great tribulation will receive the crown of life because all of them will have faced persecution to some degree, which might be implied in James 1:12. We know for certain, however, that those who are put to death for their faith will receive this crown. Believers in this dispensation of grace, though alive in Christ, have no such promise.

One other crown that is mentioned in Scripture is the *crown of glory*. As with righteousness and life, all brethren have been glorified in Christ (Romans 8:28-30). Will we receive the crown of glory, also? Apparently not.

> **Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd** [feed] **the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd** [*Christ*] **appears, you will receive the unfading *crown of glory*.** (I Peter 5:1-4)

Apostle Peter exhorted the elders—the spiritual leaders—of the kingdom brethren to faithfully shepherd their flocks (congregations) of believers. They were to lead and take care of the spiritual needs of those in their charge voluntarily (not because they were required to) and eagerly, being examples to their flock regarding how to live for the Lord. If they did so, they would receive the crown of glory at the appearing of

the Chief Shepherd. As with the crown of life, the context of this passage is the time after the rapture and during the time of great tribulation. The faithful spiritual leaders would receive their crown when Christ their Messiah appears to establish His kingdom.

It is likely that many pastors, missionaries, and other spiritual leaders today are hoping or expecting to receive the crown of glory at the judgment seat of Christ. However, Paul never refers to members of the body of Christ as sheep or to Christ as our shepherd in his letters. These are designations directly related to the people of Israel and their promised Messiah (John 10:14-15).

The previous paragraph deserves some explanation because most of us likely were taught that we are the sheep of God and that Christ is our Shepherd. In Romans 8:36, Paul quotes a passage from Psalm 44:22 to apply the principle that we are considered as sheep worthy of, or destined for, slaughter by our persecutors. He is not referring to us as the *sheep* of the Lord in the same sense that applied to the people of Israel. It is true in Acts 20:28 that Paul exhorted the elders of the church at Ephesus to shepherd their flock. The main purpose of the book of Acts is to fully demonstrate Israel's rejection of Christ their Messiah (Acts 7:51-58; 13:44-46; 18:5-6; 28:23-28), so many terms used in the book were familiar to the Jews. In this sense, however, all pastors (pastor means *shepherd* in Latin) are considered to be shepherds of their congregations or flocks.

Therefore, this is a crown that faithful ministers of our Lord in this dispensation of grace are not promised to receive. Paul was confident that he would receive the crown of righteousness, so if the crown of glory applied to faithful ministers in this dispensation, then it is likely that Paul would have mentioned that he would be receiving it, also.

Finally, a common teaching is that believers who receive crowns at the judgment seat of Christ will cast them to the feet of Christ in recognition that they were earned because of Christ's work through us. That is a noble concept because it is absolutely true that any good works that we do for our Lord are because of what God is doing through us (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; Ephesians 2:10). However, what does Scripture say about this?

> **The twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.** (Revelation 4:10-11)

So, casting crowns before the throne is in Scripture, but who are the twenty-four elders, what were their crowns, and who is on the throne? The twenty-four elders are mentioned several times in the book of Revelation, and only in that book (Revelation 4:4, 10-11; 5:8-14; 7:11-12; 11:15-18; 14:3; 19:4). The book of Revelation contains much symbolism, and it is possible that the elders represent something other than actual men (e.g., some type of beings who are spiritual principalities and powers in the heavens in the service of God—Ephesians 3:8-11), considering that there are no other references to them in prophecy. In Revelation 4:4 they are described as wearing white robes and wearing gold crowns on their heads—crowns as a king would wear. It is these elders who will cast their gold crowns before the throne. Scripture appears to indicate that this is the throne of God the Father and not the judgment seat of Christ or the great white throne (Revelation 4:2-11). This is because Christ (the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and the Lamb) is standing *next* to the throne and took the book out of the right hand of Him (God the Father) who sat on the throne (Revelation 5:1-10). Therefore, Revelation 4:10-11 cannot be construed to mean or imply that we will cast our crown of righteousness before the judgment seat of Christ.

Prize

brabīon (1017): an award, specifically a prize

> **But whatever things were gain to me** [*Paul*]**, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ** [the faith of Christ—*His faithfulness*]**, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal** [mark] **for the *prize* of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 3:7-14)

Paul was pressing toward the goal (i.e., mark or finish line) for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. His desire was to be found in Christ and to fully comprehend and appreciate all that he had through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-11). Paul realized his former status and accomplishments (a leading Jew, a Pharisee, and a persecutor of the church—Philippians 3:4-6) that he had enjoyed and zealously worked hard for were nothing—they were rubbish—compared to the blessings he had in Christ. He wanted to present the members of his body as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-22) because he knew by faith that his righteousness was from God through the faith (faithfulness) of Christ. What is the prize? It appears to be the crown of righteousness that he knew he would receive and that all brethren will receive, because we are considered by God to be righteous in Christ. We, too, should desire to be found in Christ and to live as we ought to because of the prize that awaits us.

The only other use of this Greek word is in I Corinthians 9:24-27, which was previously addressed under *crown*. In that passage we are reminded that only one runner wins the prize, but that all of us should conduct our daily walk in the same manner that athletes train through their dedication and self-discipline to honorably win a race. Our prize is the unearned crown of righteousness—eternal life—that we will receive because we are righteous in Christ.

Praise

epainos (1868): a commendable thing; praise

> **Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy** [faithful]**. But to me** [*Paul*] **it is a very small thing that I may be examined** [judged] **by you, or by any human court** [man's judgment]**; in fact, I do not even examine** [judge] **myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted** [justified]**; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's *praise* will come to him from God.** (I Corinthians 4:1-5)

Despite personally ministering to the Corinthian brethren for about eighteen months (Acts 18:11), Paul continually had to defend his apostleship to them. This was because of their problems with pride that resulted

in them aligning into different cliques (similar to denominational differences today) and being judgmental toward each other and toward Paul (I Corinthians 1:10-12; 6:1-8). Paul was frustrated with their judgments, knowing their spiritual weaknesses (I Corinthians 3:1-3; 4:6-8). He did not even judge himself because he knew that his motives for his service to them were pure (I Corinthians 4:9-13).

Therefore, Paul was telling the brethren to stop judging because our true motives would be revealed, apparently at the judgment seat of Christ. This is an assumption on my part because I Corinthians 4:5 refers to our motives being revealed, apparently as a form of judgment. However, this passage does not mention the judgment seat of Christ; it only refers to the time when the Lord comes, which for us implies the rapture. However, it might be referring to the judgment seat of Christ as suggested earlier. There are many things we will not know until the time comes.

Paul knew that he would be judged—praised—as a faithful servant (I Timothy 1:12; II Timothy 4:6-7). What this praise will consist of is not described. It is not referred to as a reward or a crown in this passage or context. Perhaps it will be verbal acknowledgment just as Paul considered his coworkers to be faithful servants of God (I Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7; 4:7-9). Although all believers will receive the crown of righteousness, it is very doubtful that we will all be considered faithful in our service to God.

Peter referred to *praise* in a similar way in I Peter 1:6-9. The faithfulness of the kingdom brethren will result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Christ, which refers to His second coming to establish His kingdom on earth. Their faith will have been tested during the tribulation period, as though by fire. Therefore, perhaps it can be assumed that the faithfulness (including the motives of our service) of all brethren through the ages will be revealed by God through Christ at some time or another.

Reign

sumbasilūo (4821): to be co-regent; reign with

> **It is a trustworthy** [faithful] **statement: for if we died with Him** [*Christ*]**, we will also live with Him; if we endure** [suffer]**, we will also *reign* with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless** [believe not]**, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.** (II Timothy 2:11-13)

I am convinced that the first part of this faithful saying describes all believers—all members of the body of Christ (II Timothy 2:8-10). We have died with Christ and we live with, and because of, Him (Romans 6:3-11; Galatians 2:20). Furthermore, because we have two opposite natures working against each other within us, and because we have bodies of flesh and live in a sinful world, all believers suffer to some degree (Romans 7:14-25; 8:16-23). It is also true that we are guaranteed to suffer if we actually live for Christ (Philippians 1:27-30; II Timothy 3:10-12). Finally, *all* brethren are already in Christ at the right hand of God (Ephesians 2:4-7). Through our inheritance, *all* brethren have everything He has (Ephesians 1:3-14). Therefore, when He reigns, we will reign with Him. Because we are the same in Christ (there is no difference—Romans 10:12; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28), this promise does not say that some believers will have a special position over that of other brethren because of their works or extra faithfulness. It would be arrogant for us to think this way.

The second part of this faithful saying appears to be referring to nonbelievers. When we believe the gospel of salvation (by faith), we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39). If we truly deny the Lord Jesus Christ, it is because we were not saved in the first place—we did not truly believe that Christ died for us (see I Corinthians 15:2 about *believing in vain*). If, as believers, we live sinful lives contrary to the will of God, we remain saved and sealed because Christ and God remain faithful—they will save us because they promised to do so.

So, in what manner will we reign with Christ? We are not told in Scripture. I do not believe we will have any part in Christ's reign on earth during His millennial kingdom. That kingdom is promised to Israel, and Paul never says that we—members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace—will have any part of it. Scripture does say that the twelve apostles will be sitting on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel during the millennial kingdom (Matthew 19:28)—in that sense they will be reigning with Christ on earth. Furthermore, those who were put to death for their faith during the great tribulation will reign with Christ in some manner (Revelation 20:4-6).

I believe that although Christ will physically reign on earth in His kingdom, He is already reigning from His heavenly position and will continue to do so (Christ's presence is not confined by physical constraints). Afterall, we are already above the angels because we are in Christ and will somehow judge them and the world (I Corinthians 6:1-3; Ephesians 1:19-23). Paul also briefly mentions the dispensation of the fullness of times when all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, are one (Ephesians 1:9-10; I Corinthians 15:20-28). This time will be after the millennial (1,000-year) kingdom and after death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire for eternity (Revelation 20:11-15). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that we will be reigning with Christ for eternity.

The only other use of this Greek word is in I Corinthians 4:6-8. In this passage, Paul sarcastically referred to the Corinthian brethren as those who reigned like kings because, through their arrogance, they did not acknowledge that what they received was from God through Paul and Apollos. If indeed they did reign as kings, then Paul and Apollos could reign with them! This is another good example where we should be humble instead of arrogant. Too many believers are proud of their salvation, their knowledge, and their works, as if they were gaining or accomplishing these things by their own will.

We Will Give an Account

So far, we have looked at all the verses and passages in Paul's letters, supplemented by other Scripture as appropriate, regarding the words *reward*, *crown*, *prize*, *praise*, and *reign* as they pertain to our judgment. According to my understanding, our reward, crown, and prize are all referring to eternal life that we will receive based on Christ's righteousness through the work that He accomplished for us at the cross. That is, they have nothing to do with our works for our Lord.

Going back to the beginning of this study, however, what about the facts that all believers in this dispensation of grace will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of ourselves, and that we will be recompensed for the things we have done in the body, whether good or bad? This is a difficult question that I will try to address for your consideration by giving my understanding of the following passages.

> **But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God** [Christ]**. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.** (Romans 14:10-12)

> **Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him** [*God*]**. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.** (II Corinthians 5:9-10)

When we stand before a judge, it is usually to plead guilty or not guilty for whatever crime we are accused of. Through the trial process we may have the opportunity to present our own defense—our own explanation

of why we believe we are not guilty. Or, if we are found to be guilty, we can plead our case to the judge or jury to receive mercy or lesser punishment. This may include admitting our guilt, expressing our sorrow for our actions, listing the good things we do in our life, and promising to be a better person.

So, we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will give an account of ourselves. What might that entail? Are we going to recount to our Lord all the good things we did for Him? Are we going to try to convince Him that we are worthy to be in heaven and deserve to be rewarded? Perhaps we think that we are going to say some of the following things:

- I accepted You as my Savior through the exercise of my own free will; I decided to trust You.[7]
- I was a missionary, pastor, church elder, Sunday School teacher, or youth minister.
- I faithfully attended or served in such and such church.
- I gave this much of my income as tithe.
- I did far more good things than bad things, including such and such.
- I led this many people to salvation because of my witness or preaching.
- I started this many churches or Bible study groups.
- I wrote this many Bible study articles or books.
- I worked harder for You than other believers.
- I faithfully obeyed *the Great Commission*.
- I understand the gospel of grace because I studied harder and had more faith than other believers.

Brethren, our Lord already knows what we have done and what we have not done, and He knows our motivation for doing so. I think it would be rather arrogant for us to stand before Him to tell Him how good or faithful we were. I do not know what it will be like to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but I expect that I will be humbled. I will be standing before my Savior because of what He did for me and not because of what I did for Him. Therefore, I will be standing before our Lord as one who is unworthy but who has been counted as righteous by the grace of God. I hope that my account of myself gives all praise to God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and that I will not use *any* of the claims listed above or any other claims touting my perceived accomplishments.

Present Ourselves Approved to God

> **Be diligent** [study] **to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

This is an incredibly important verse in Scripture. Unfortunately, it is often understood to mean some things that it does not say. Some brethren understand this verse to mean that if we study the word of God hard enough that we will figure out how to rightly divide the Bible and, therefore, be approved of God at the judgment seat of Christ. Is this correct? Let us take a closer look at this verse, for it is truly significant.

In the KJV, the verse begins with "Study to shew thyself approved unto God..." The word *study* is an old English word translated from the Greek word *spoudazo*, which means *to endeavor* or *to be diligent*. The Greek word is used fourteen times in Scripture and is translated as *study* only in this verse. Because of the KJV translation, however, some brethren tend to consider themselves better, or more fully approved, than those brethren who do not study as much and have not figured out how to rightly divide Scripture.

[7] See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** for an examination of God's role in our salvation. Who chooses whom?

Studying the word of God is critically important if we want to understand what God wants us to know and how He wants us to live as His children. However, the degree to which we study and the measure of our understanding should never be used as a source of pride—we are not in competition with each other. We are to be diligent in our service to God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and understanding the word of God is one factor in doing so (another is applying what we know in our daily walk). Furthermore, we need to humbly remember that anything of God's truth that we understand is because of the measure of faith that He gave each of us and because He opened our eyes to understanding (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 1:15-21; Colossians 1:9-10). We should be thankful instead of proud, and should use our knowledge in ways that bring glory to God.

God wants us to rightly divide, or accurately handle, His word as explained in Chapter 4. To do so not only includes recognizing the difference between the Law of Moses and the grace of God, prophecy and the mystery, and the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, it also means living how God expects us to live. We are to no longer walk according to sin but in a manner befitting our salvation in Christ. God has provided all the information we need to do so through His word, and the means to do so through His Holy Spirit.

Finally, I am convinced that II Timothy 2:15 is not referring to standing approved before the judgment seat of Christ, for there is no mention of judgment or reward. Because we have been justified, glorified, and made righteous in Christ, we will stand before the judgment seat as being approved to God. The context of this verse regards our daily walk as believers. Paul wanted Timothy to conduct himself in such a manner that he was approved of God, just as Paul considered his coworker Apelles to be approved in Christ (Romans 16:10).

We, too, are to be strong in the grace of God, focus on serving our Lord in truth, and endure the suffering that results from doing so. Furthermore, we are to use the word of God accurately and not dispute over words—over things that are not true or are of no purpose—because doing so leads to the ruin of the hearers and further ungodliness (II Timothy 2:14, 16-23; Titus 3:9). We are to abstain from wickedness (II Timothy 2:19; I Thessalonians 5:21-22). This is what God approves of—it is what He wants us to do to be useful to Him and to be a worker who does not need to be ashamed.

Recompensed for the Things We have Done

In what way, then, will we be recompensed for the things we have done in the body—while we were alive on this earth? Many brethren use II Corinthians 5:9-10 to support their position that they will obtain greater rewards and positions in heaven than other believers based on their works. As previously offered, I believe that all our self-motivated works for our Lord will burn, regardless of how good we think they were. Perhaps our Lord will show us at that time all the good works that God accomplished through us so that our praise will go to Him instead of to ourselves.

Were people saved through our witness? What a wonderful thing to be an instrument of the Almighty God in the accomplishment of His will, but who changed their hearts and did the saving (I Corinthians 3:5-7; Ephesians 2:8-9; II Thessalonians 2:13-14; II Timothy 1:8-9)? To whom should the praise go? Did some fellow brethren come to a better understanding of the word of God through our teaching or preaching? That is wonderful, also, but who opened their eyes to understanding (Acts 16:14; Ephesians 1:15-21)? To whom should the praise go?

I freely admit that *I do not know* in what form God will recompense us for our deeds, whether good or bad. I do know that all our sins are forgiven, so our sins will not be judged at the judgment seat of Christ. I do know that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavens because of what Christ accomplished for us at the cross. I do know that we are complete in Christ. And I do know that He who began

a good work in us will complete it because He is working through us to will and to work for His good pleasure. Based on what God has done for us through Christ, I do not think it is in our best interest to speculate what we can gain back from Him through our works. Do we really *deserve* anything? He has promised us His peace, which is sufficient for me (Philippians 4:4-9).

> **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him** [*God*] **be the glory forever. Amen.** (Romans 11:33-36)

What is Our Motivation?

Brethren, our motives driving the works we do for our Lord will be judged by our Lord. To me, this is of greater significance to us than the works themselves. Thankfully, there are people who do good things from pure motives. However, there are many good things done by people, both believers and nonbelievers, that are accomplished for personal recognition or gain. We love to be recognized for our efforts or for being the best at something, and it is even better when we can make money from it. However, this is man's way of thinking, and we think differently than God does (Proverbs 14:12; Isaiah 40:18, 25; 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36; I Corinthians 2:11-16).

> **For consider your calling** [*salvation*]**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame** [confound] **the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast** [glory] **before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."** (I Corinthians 1:26-31)

If we need motivation to serve our Lord, consider what God has done for us. He saved us from our sin by His grace through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. He blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. Through His grace we belong to Christ and He belongs to God. Brethren, God made us complete in Christ.

> **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** (Romans 5:8-10)

> **Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me** [*Paul*] **His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us** [*believers*] **and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.** (II Timothy 1:8-9)

> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us** [*believers*] **with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He** [*God*] **chose us in Him** [*Christ*] **before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him** [*God*]**. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons** [children] **through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind**

intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us [made us accepted] **in the Beloved.** (Ephesians 1:3-6)

So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas [*Peter*] **or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.** (I Corinthians 3:21-23)

For in Him [*Christ*] **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.** (Colossians 2:9-10)

We should endeavor to do good works. Why? First, God has told us that He wants us to do them. And second, our good works are intended to help others and exemplify what God through Christ has done for us. However, we must be humble and remember that any good works we do are because God is working through us according to His will.

Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He [*God*] **who began a good work in you will perfect** [perform] **it until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 1:6)

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

Realizing what God has done for us through Christ, and that He is working through us according to His will and not ours, should cause us to be thankful and should be the only motivation we need to do what is right. It should be our desire to walk worthy of our salvation in Christ because it is the right thing to do.

Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right [honest]**, even though we may appear unapproved.** (II Corinthians 13:7)

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. (Colossians 3:23)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

Our Motivation Summarized

All those in Christ—everyone who believes that Christ died for his or her sins—will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Our works in the service of our Lord, as well as our motives for performing them, will be judged.

What rewards can we expect? Scripture only refers to *reward* in the singular. Therefore, we cannot expect to receive more rewards than our fellow brethren. Paul said that we will receive the reward of the inheritance. What about crowns? Paul, a chosen apostle of Jesus Christ and the dispenser of the gospel of grace of God, only refers to expecting to receive the crown of righteousness. The reward of the inheritance and the crown of righteousness may be two representations of the same thing and, if so, likely refer to our inheritance of eternal life. Why? Because we have life and righteousness in, and because of, Christ.

Our goal as believers, therefore, should *not* be to conduct our lives in such a way as to *earn* rewards for our efforts. That is man's way of thinking, and man's ways are not God's ways. God, through His word, has exhorted us to do good works, to live according to the fruit of the Spirit, and to walk worthy of our salvation. Furthermore, God is performing His work, which He established from the beginning, through us for His good pleasure. Therefore, any good works that we do will be judged as those works that God performed through us. There will be no room for boasting at the judgment seat of Christ.

Furthermore, I do not believe that any of the verses or passages referenced herein can be interpreted to say or imply that some believers will earn, through their service to God, greater positions in heaven than others. Let us not be like the Corinthian brethren who were proud of their works and who acted like kings, forgetting that everything they had and would receive was from God.

If we do not receive (earn) tangible rewards or greater positions in heaven over our fellow brethren because of our works, then what is the point in serving our Lord? For those who ask that question, I believe they should analyze their own motives to determine who they are working for—themselves or for our Lord. Instead, we should do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, including doing good to all people. Is there reward in that? Most certainly there is, because it should be our desire to be found in Christ.

> **But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ** [the faith of Christ—*His faithfulness*]**, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**[8] (Philippians 3:7-11)
>
> **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.** (I Corinthians 15:58)

[8] That is, to live as one who is resurrected from the dead—dead to sin and alive in Christ (Romans 6:3-11).

Chapter 12

Consequences of Walking Worthy

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (II Timothy 3:12)

What Kinds of Consequences?

We have seen what the Bible says about how to walk worthy of our salvation and what I believe our motivation should be to do so. What can we expect if we conduct our lives in a manner that brings honor and glory to God? What are the consequences of obeying God?

Before addressing the opening verse for this chapter, let us review some of the consequences that have already been described. As believers, we are exhorted to walk in Christ by the Spirit. If we truly endeavor to do so, then we will not carry out the desires of the flesh and suffer the consequences for doing so (Galatians 5:16-21; 6:7). Instead, our lives will display the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-25). These are all traits that should be desirable to all believers.

Perhaps love is the common denominator of all the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, and I hope I adequately addressed the importance of love in Chapter 5 and elsewhere in this book. If we know and experience the love of God, then we can know His peace and realize joy in the Lord, which help us to be content regardless of our circumstances. The peace of God is presented as a promise if we sincerely take all our concerns to Him in prayer with thanksgiving and endeavor to live as He wants us to live (i.e., to walk worthy of our salvation). Knowing the joy of the Lord and being content are naturally associated with experiencing the peace of God (Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 2:17-18; II Corinthians 12:9-10).

> **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I** [*Paul*] **will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in** [through] **Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell** [think] **on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:4-9)
>
> **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** (Romans 15:13)
>
> **But I** [*Paul*] **rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him** [Christ] **who strengthens me.** (Philippians 4:10-13)

One would think that believers in general would seek and embrace knowing the peace of God and experiencing joy in the Lord and being content. Unfortunately, it seems that few of us realize these intangible qualities in our lives because we get so caught up in our own worries or the distractions and pitfalls of daily

life. It is not natural for us to truly give our lives over to God and our Lord Jesus Christ in the thoughts we have and the things we do. Instead, we cling to wanting some degree of self-control over everything and, unfortunately, often suffer accordingly by experiencing the opposite of peace, joy, and contentment. Correspondingly, the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are often difficult to realize.

Considering our opening verse, however, who among us wants or expects to suffer persecution? Yet doing so is a promise from God if we serve Him and our Lord Jesus Christ in the manner that is expected of us. Persecution, therefore, is a natural consequence of walking worthy of our salvation. I have referred to suffering and persecution in the context of various aspects of our walk as believers, but I want to focus on suffering for Christ in this chapter because I believe it is generally misunderstood. Please think about what you consider persecution to be and how you react to it as you read the following verses and passages and my understanding of them.

Overview of Suffering Persecution

> **Only conduct yourselves** [*walk*] **in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I** *[Paul*] **come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict** [*persecution*] **which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.** (Philippians 1:27-30)

The Philippian believers were exhorted to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ and to stand firm in the truth. They were to do this despite opposition from others because, on behalf of Christ or for His sake, God had granted to them not only salvation in Christ but also to suffer for Him. They, as well as the Thessalonian believers and perhaps the faithful brethren in all the cities that Paul and his coworkers established churches, suffered greatly for their obedience to God and our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:14-16; 3:6-8; II Thessalonians 1:3-5). Persecution is a natural consequence of living godly lives because, by nature, people resist and fight the truth of God, and Satan hates us because we no longer belong to him (II Timothy 3:12; Ephesians 2:1-3).

Many believers complain of persecution and seek justice or retribution through the courts and media. This is contrary to the instructions and examples we have in Scripture as addressed in Chapter 10. We are to consider true persecution as a blessing, endure the persecution because we will draw strength from it, and even bless those who persecute us (Matthew 5:11; John 15:18-20; Romans 5:3-5; 12:14, 17-19; II Corinthians 1:5-7; I Peter 2:21-23). To resist or fight for our perceived rights as Christians implies that God does not know what He is doing in our lives (Philippians 2:13; I Peter 4:19). Instead, we are to forgive those who wrong or defraud us and, if possible, try to reconcile with them (Ephesians 4:32; Romans 12:20-21; I Corinthians 4:11-13; 6:7).

When our Lord stood unjustly accused by His own people before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, did He fight for His rights? No. Instead, He responded in the following way.

> **Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."** (John 18:36)

We will see later how Jesus responded when He was being crucified, and how Stephen responded when he was being stoned to death. Apostle Paul, too, suffered tremendous physical persecution from nonbelievers opposed to the gospel of grace (II Corinthians 11:23-27; Acts 14:19), and emotional persecution from brethren who were envious of his authority (Philippians 1:15-17). Finally, he was put to death for His service for Christ (II Timothy 4:6-7). What was his response to imprisonments and imminent death?

Some of us bring persecution upon ourselves for the wrong reasons. Instead, if we suffer for our Lord, let it be for the right thing (I Peter 3:17). If we are being persecuted for meaningless or unscriptural causes, we are bringing it upon ourselves. If we are to suffer for Christ, it should be for the truth and with pure motives; otherwise, it is self-inflicted or self-centered persecution for no worthwhile purpose. We need to walk uprightly and godly, so as not to be guilty of causing nonbelievers to blaspheme God because of our actions (Romans 2:24).

Some believers in some countries suffer imprisonment, beatings, and even death because of their faith. Most of us, however, are persecuted in other ways. Standing for the truth may result in the loss of friends or even fellowship with relatives. Unfortunately, our greatest opposition may be from fellow believers. Because of our stand for the gospel of grace and understanding of the distinctiveness and importance of Paul's ministry, we may be rejected by our Christian friends and made unwelcome in, or even forced to leave, our church fellowship. We may suffer ridicule to our faces or behind our backs. Whatever may happen, we must understand that all believers are in God's hands, and we are to rejoice in Him regardless of our circumstances and not seek retribution against those who persecute us in any way. Instead, we should set our pride aside and bless those who persecute us.

Suffering for Christ

> **"Blessed are you** [*disciples*] **when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me** [*Jesus*]**."** (Matthew 5:11)

The perception among many Christians and Christian organizations today is that Christianity is under attack and that Christians must do everything in their power to fight back or else lose their right to exercise their faith. Do you think that Christians are being persecuted in America? Do you feel that Christian morals are being challenged and that this country must return to its Christian roots?

Does it frustrate or even anger you when you hear that monuments to the Ten Commandments are ordered to be removed from public places, or that students are not allowed to pray in public schools, or that God is left out of the classroom, or that "Christ" is removed from Christmas? What about causes carried out in the name of God that receive resistance? Do you want those people or organizations who undermine Christianity or godly principles to be brought to justice through our courts? What does Scripture say about Christian suffering and persecution?

I use the term *Christian rights* (first introduced in Chapter 10) throughout this chapter, because many people who profess to be Christians in America are convinced that their perceived God-given rights are being infringed upon by the government or other religions. As you read this chapter, please recall the following truths regarding our salvation in Christ:

- We are saved from the consequences of our sins by believing the gospel of salvation, which is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 3:21-26).

- Salvation is by the undeserved grace of God—it is through belief in the gospel of salvation apart from any works of righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:4-5; 10:8-10).
- Prior to salvation we are spiritually dead in our sins and members of this evil world—we are children of wrath because we are children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-3; 5:6-8; Galatians 1:3-5).
- Upon believing the gospel of salvation we become members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Galatians 3:26-28). God considers us to be His adopted children in Christ at His own right hand and citizens of heaven (Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 3:20-21). That is, God called us out of this world and into His realm (John 15:19; 18:36).

As citizens of heaven, we are not of this world even though we reside in it (Romans 12:1-2). Does that mean we have dual citizenship? No, because we are either dead in sin or alive in Christ; we are either children of disobedience (i.e., Satan) or children of God. Therefore, we are as legal aliens in this world and are ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). That is, we are representing Christ in this evil world.

According to these truths of God, although we continue to be in this world we are not of it. Therefore, how can we claim to have rights as Christians? How can we expect the nonbelieving world and its justice system to recognize what we have in Christ? I believe that we cannot do so. Furthermore, I do not believe that God wants us to work with or against the worldly system in the hope of preventing suffering for Christ. I will try to substantiate my position through an examination of Scripture.

What does it mean to suffer for Christ? If we feel we are being persecuted, we should be sure in our minds why we are being persecuted, and our response to the persecution should be appropriate in God's eyes. We are instructed in Scripture about how God views persecution and suffering and how we should respond to it. In addition to II Timothy 3:12, Philippians 1:27-30, and Matthew 5:11 presented above, please prayerfully consider the following verses and passages.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14)

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we [*believers*] **are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I** [*Paul*] **consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.** (Romans 8:16-18)

Make sure that none of you [*believers*] **suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name** [*of Christ*]**.** (I Peter 4:15-16)

And not only this, but we [*believers*] **also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** (Romans 5:3-5)

To this present hour we [*Paul and his coworkers*] **are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.** (I Corinthians 4:11-13)

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours [*Paul and his coworkers*] **in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.** (II Corinthians 1:5-7)

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

As we face persecution or suffering in our lives because we are living for God and our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to be mindful of these verses and passages. The following truths can be gleaned from them:

- We will be persecuted if we live godly lives in Christ our Lord.
- It is a blessing to be persecuted for the sake of Christ.
- We are to bless those who persecute us.
- Our sufferings in this life do not compare to the glory in Christ that we will inherit.
- We are to be thankful for our tribulations and should glorify God as we live for Christ.
- We should try to soothe or gain the goodwill of, and perhaps even reconcile with, those who persecute us.
- If we suffer it should be for doing the right thing, and we should endure it with patience.
- If we suffer for the sake of Christ, we can also realize or experience our comfort in Christ.
- We should not be alarmed by our adversaries or seek retribution or revenge for our suffering; instead, we are to respond in kindness and leave judgment to God.

It is one thing to suffer for Christ; that is, to suffer for living as we ought to live in accordance with the word of God. It is quite another thing to suffer persecution, or perceived persecution, because of misguided intentions or because of our naïve or irresponsible behavior.

For example, we should not suffer as a troublesome meddler, but as a Christian (I Peter 4:15-16). In other words, we should not bring unnecessary ridicule on ourselves, on God, or on our Lord Jesus Christ by misrepresenting God or His word in this godless world. We should examine our motives and not cause people to blaspheme God as the people of Israel consistently did (Romans 2:17-24). If we suffer, it should be for doing the right thing. The one who suffers for the right thing should glorify God, be thankful, and not complain or seek retribution.

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. (I Peter 4:19)

Christ suffered greatly for us, not only to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:5-8) but by going to hell to pay the full price of our sin (total spiritual suffering and death—Ephesians 4:9-10; Romans 6:10). As much as He suffered physically, however, He left it to the faithful to suffer even more—to fill up what was lacking (Colossians 1:24). Besides our Lord, Scripture provides many examples of suffering in the name of God.

- Israel persecuted and killed the prophets sent by God (Acts 7:52).
- John the Baptist was bound, imprisoned, and beheaded (Matthew 14:3-10).

- Steven was stoned to death (Acts 7:58-60).
- Paul was whipped and beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and put to death (II Corinthians 11:24-26; II Timothy 4:6).
- Other faithful believers were ill-treated, left destitute, mocked, scourged, tortured, imprisoned, stoned, killed by the sword, and even sawn in two (Hebrews 11:35-38).

These people suffered greatly because they stood for God and proclaimed His word. Suffering and persecution were the outcome of living godly lives and fighting the good fight of faith. Brethren, remember that fighting the good fight of faith does not mean physically fighting or even challenging the laws of our land or our nonbelieving family members or friends. Instead, it means to be unwavering and not retreating from the truth of God as we live in this ungodly world (Ephesians 6:10-17; Philippians 4:1; II Timothy 4:7).

> **Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.** (I Timothy 6:12)

> **Therefore I** [*Paul*] **urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable** [*well-pleasing*] **to God, which is your spiritual service of worship** [reasonable service]**. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** (Romans 12:1-2)

> **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.** (I Corinthians 15:58)

Even today, believers in some parts of the world experience physical suffering, even death, for proclaiming the gospel of salvation or for no other reason than being known as a Christian (e.g., through worshiping with other believers or by not denying their faith). This type of persecution is rare in America. For this we should be thankful and not be so quick to complain. Or, perhaps, we should consider why we are not suffering for Christ. Are we living for Christ or are we conformed to this world?

Perceived Persecution in America

As stated earlier, many Christians, particularly those who consider themselves to be evangelical or conservative Christians, consider themselves to be under great persecution. They are convinced that our Christian rights are being undermined through laws and the efforts of non-Christian organizations. Is this really happening? I have already addressed, in Chapter 10, the perceived but false belief that Christian persecution and the erosion of our Christian rights will end if we vote in *the right people*. The following examples of perceived persecution have also been addressed to some extent in previous chapters, but let us take another look at them to see what Scripture has to say about them.

National Repentance

A common belief among Christians today is that Christianity is under attack in America because of its decline into sin. Many brethren have the sincere desire for America to turn back to God so that we can receive and enjoy the blessings of God as promised in Scripture. However, all references in the Bible regarding national repentance and blessings are addressed to the nation of Israel.[1] It was Israel that God raised up to be a nation for Himself because of the sinfulness of all the other nations (Deuteronomy 14:2; 18:9-14; 26:18-19). Most of

[1] See my study **The Law of Moses** that addresses the promises that would accompany Israel's full obedience of the Law, as well as the adverse consequences if the nation did not do so.

the Bible is addressed to Israel and God's purpose and plan for that nation. Because of its continued disobedience, however, God blinded (hardened) Israel and set it aside as a favored nation until the fulness of the Gentiles has come—until God is finished offering His grace to the Gentiles (Romans 10:1-3; 11:25-32; II Corinthians 3:14-15; Acts 9:15-16). It is a temporary blindness, therefore, but one that continues to this day and will not end until sometime after the rapture.

In this dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-12), all believers are members of the body of Christ. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, or slave and free people (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-28). Furthermore, God has no favored nation at this time—not the State of Israel, not America, not any country. Brethren, it is a misuse of Scripture to claim God's promises to Israel as our own (II Timothy 2:15).

The desire for America to *turn back to God* is a misconception. Neither America, nor any other nation, is a Christian nation or was founded on Christianity or the laws of God. Freemasonry, which worships the god of all religions, was the predominant religion among our founding fathers. The good laws that are in place—those that reflect the goodness or principles of God—in this and *all* other countries exist because God is sovereign and is working out His will through vessels of honor *and* dishonor (Romans 9:14-24). Does God really want us to try to moralize our sinful nation or the world? No. How can a person or a nation endeavor to obey God without first knowing Christ as Savior? Please consider, again, our natural condition prior to our salvation as described in Chapter 2.

- The natural man cannot understand the things of God (I Corinthians 2:14).
- The natural man cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).
- The natural man does not seek after God (Romans 3:10-11).
- The deeds of the flesh (natural man) are completely contrary to God (Galatians 5:16-21).

We cannot expect people to become morally upright (i.e., living according to God's will) without first being saved (no one will become sinless, however). The first thing Paul told the Corinthians was the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Only *after* salvation can we learn how to live for God and our Lord Jesus Christ and be able to do so. No nation is righteous or morally upright—nor has there ever been such a nation. Only when Israel is redeemed (which will occur sometime after the rapture) will there be a righteous nation, and that is because God will spiritually change the people of Israel and write His Law on their hearts (Ezekiel 36:22-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:16-17). No such promise was made to any other nation, nor can it be spiritually applied to any other nation. America will never be obedient to God.

The Ten Commandments

Successful civil lawsuits have forced the removal of monuments to the Ten Commandments from public buildings across the country. Many Christians cry *Persecution!* at such occurrences. Is this really an act or symbol of persecution? Does God really want us to obey the Ten Commandments and force obedience of them on our country or the world (Exodus 20:3-17)? Brethren, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, we need to understand that God set aside the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses and instituted His gospel of grace through Paul; we need to realize the following truths:

- The penalty for breaking four of the ten commandments was death.
- The Law killed us (spiritually) because no one is righteous according to the Law.
- If we try to keep part of the Law, we are under obligation to keep the whole Law.

Please consider that our federal laws incorporate only three of the ten commandments. Only murder, stealing, and bearing false witness (in some cases) are subject to punishment, and only one (murder) can result in the death penalty in some states. Furthermore, the right to freedom of religious expression directly contradicts the first four commandments. Brethren, the United States Constitution is a good governing document but is not a holy or sacred document inspired by God.

Removal of monuments to the Ten Commandments from public places should not be a concern to believers—removing them is not a symbol of Christian persecution. Believers, however, should *not* want to impose the Ten Commandments on anyone because God has taken the Law of Moses out of the way and replaced it with righteousness by faith in Christ's work for us at the cross. No one can be saved by reading or trying to obey them. Furthermore, if the Ten Commandments are displayed in public places, including school classrooms, how can other religions (even Satanic cults) be prevented from posting their material? Even the posting of other religious tenets does not justify displaying the Ten Commandments.

Prayer in Schools

Christians decry the fact, and consider it to be persecution, when laws are passed that prevent prayer and Bible classes in public schools. Does God really want us to pray publicly in schools? Please consider all the religions in America and in the world. What is to stop anyone from praying to whomever or whatever he chooses? Our prayers are between us and God, and we should be careful to avoid the hypocritical appearance of praying to be seen by people or demonstrating our *righteousness* (actually self-righteousness) before nonbelieving people.

> **"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."** (Matthew 6:5-6)

Because we are children of God and have the Holy Spirit, we can pray to God any time of the day and anywhere without drawing attention to ourselves. We can pray discreetly and silently (in our minds), without kneeling or bowing before God, or without even closing our eyes.[2] Brethren, laws against prayer in school, or even studying the Bible in school, should not be considered as a form of persecution. Instead, we should be thankful because the laws preventing these activities actually help prevent open blasphemy against God.

Regarding Bible teaching in our public schools, what do we expect to be taught and who is going to teach it? Our many Christian denominations and subdivisions within those denominations attest to the wide misunderstanding and disagreement regarding Bible doctrine or what the Bible is even about. There is enough false doctrine taught in our churches today without subjecting public school children to false doctrine, also. Furthermore, as with the pitfalls of posting the Ten Commandments, what is to prevent the teaching of any religion or religious cult in the classrooms?

Christmas (and Other Days)

"Merry Christmas" is often replaced by "Happy Holidays" or some other non-religious salutation to avoid being disrespectful to non-Christians. This change in greeting over the last few decades has been very

[2] I address prayer further in Chapter 14.

upsetting to many Christians who consider it to be a form of persecution and an infringement on their right to celebrate Christmas according to the word of God. But is it?

Christmas is considered by many Christians to be one of the two most holy days of the year, the other being Easter. I will not try to explain the history of Christmas but, brethren, Christmas is not in the Bible. Nothing in Scripture tells us to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We do not even know the month of His birth from Scripture, let alone the day, and I believe God left that information out of His word for a reason (that is, so we would not observe it). Unknown to most Christians, however, is that the Bible says *not* to celebrate Christmas as a spiritual holiday (which is derived from *holy day*), although not in those specific words.

Under the Law of Moses, there were many holy days, weeks, months, and years (e.g., Leviticus 23:1-43; 25:1-22). All the required observances (ordinances)—appointed times of the Lord (Leviticus 23:2, 44)—were to help the people of Israel remember what God had done for them when He brought them out of Egypt so that they could enter their promised land (Deuteronomy 5:12-15; 6:20-25; 7:7-8). They were integral and necessary parts of their worship of God. However, we are no longer under the Law but under grace. Because we are no longer under the Law of Moses, there are no holy observances to celebrate (Colossians 2:16-17).

> **But now that you** [*Galatian believers*] **have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I** [*Paul*] **fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:9-11)

Furthermore, spiritual celebrations and songs for the Christmas season often focus on Jesus as an infant (as well as prophetic kingdom promises directly related to Israel). When we celebrate someone's birthday, do we think of them as an infant or as the person they have become? More importantly, however, is that although we know and are thankful that Jesus was born as a human and suffered as a man, we are no longer to know Him as a man of flesh (or as a baby). Instead, we are to know and live for Him as our resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

> **For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live** [*i.e., believers*] **might** [should] **no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.** (II Corinthians 5:14-16)

This is not to say that it is wrong to celebrate Christmas in a secular sense. It is a time of family gatherings and exchanging of gifts, and we can experience comfort and joy when focusing on these positive aspects of Christmas. Unfortunately, the economic impacts of the season are often emphasized, and the exchanging of gifts can lead to, or result in, pride, coveting, disappointment, and financial debt. Sometimes, sadly, the worst of family dynamics surface during this time. Personally, I enjoy the Christmas season with my family and friends.

Brethren, the same concept applies to the spiritual celebration of Easter—another *Christian* holiday with very unchristian roots. We are not told in Scripture to picture Jesus hanging on the cross, or to reenact the events leading up to His crucifixion, His crucifixion, or His resurrection.[3] Only through our Lord's revelation to Paul regarding what has come to be called *communion* (i.e., the Lord's Supper) are we given a means to remind

[3] Nor did God command or expect Israel to reenact the events associated with the judgments of Egypt, their escape from Egypt and sojourn in the wilderness, or entering and conquering their promised land.

ourselves (although not on a specified date or frequency) of our sinful condition and what Christ accomplished for us at the cross (I Corinthians 11:20-34). I will address this further in Chapter 14.

Some Christians and businesses take Sunday off in observance of, or in obedience to, God's commands regarding the sabbath day. They often consider it to be persecution if they experience any form of judgment or ridicule regarding their observance. Again, we are no longer under the Law of Moses, and there are no holy days in this dispensation of grace. Furthermore, no one actually observes the sabbath requirements and restrictions outlined in Scripture. It is wise not to work every day of the week, or at least too many days in a row without a break from work. But this should be for physical and mental health reasons, and for preservation of relationships, instead of observing a holy day.

As believers, it is important to set aside time for worship and fellowship with other brethren (Hebrews 10:23-25), whether it is on a Sunday or any other day of the week. However, it is not correct for us to refer to Sunday (or Saturday) as the *Sabbath Day* or *the Lord's Day*. Because there are no sabbath days (or sabbath years) in this dispensation of grace, we should not even attempt to obey (in part or as a whole) the strict sabbath requirements that God demanded in the Law of Moses;[4] breaking even one of them was to be punished by death (Exodus 31:12-16). Paul established many churches and referred to churches in the homes of his coworkers (Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2), but he never designated when these churches should meet because no day is more important than another.

With all of this said, one may still ask if there is any harm in observing special days in our worship of God. Afterall, do not *all* Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter?[5] Is it not a good way to fellowship with other believers and express our love for God and our Lord Jesus Christ? Is it not a good testimony to the nonbelieving world? I know all too well that the position I have presented is very unpopular and is rejected by most fellow believers. However, brethren, we need to remember that the word of God is not about what we think we should do but about what God commands us to do (and not to do). Under the Law of Moses, God commanded (through Moses) that *all* the laws, statutes, and ordinances were to be strictly obeyed and that *nothing* was to be added or taken away from it (Deuteronomy 4:1-2). Our Lord, when He was on earth ministering to His people of Israel, obeyed the Law of Moses to the letter (Galatians 4:4; Matthew 5:17-19; II Corinthians 5:21).

Although we are no longer under the Law of Moses, the same principle of obedience to God applies to this dispensation of grace. If God had wanted us to observe Christmas, Easter, or other days, months, seasons, or years in our worship of Him, then He would have commanded us to do so through Apostle Paul, His chosen apostle of the Gentiles. Instead, God has told us that His word is complete and provides everything we need to know regarding our salvation and our walk in Christ (Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 3:8-10; II Timothy 3:16-17). I humbly submit, therefore, that observing holidays as part of our worship is contrary to the will of God.

Health Mandates

During 2020 and 2021, the United States and the world endured the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the worst pandemic since the 1918 – 1920 Spanish flu epidemic. We lost over one million people to COVID-19, and many more millions died worldwide. Many believers were against, and often refused to obey, variously restrictive mandates (laws) issued by all levels of government regarding gatherings for church services and

[4] See Exodus 20:9-10; 31:12-16; 35:2-3; Leviticus 23:1-38; 24:1-8, and Numbers 15:32-36; 28:9-10 for sabbath requirements under the Law of Moses.

[5] For various reasons, not all denominations or nondenominational churches and individuals observe Christmas and Easter.

taking COVID-19 vaccines. They considered these mandates to be contrary to their faith and their enforcement to be religious persecution. In their own defense, the phrase *faith over fear* became prominent among Christians. Basically, they were saying that they preferred to put their trust in God or Jesus and would not fear the disease—they did not want the government to tell them that they could not worship or what to do with their bodies. Were these mandates a form of persecution?

I agree that believers should not fear any disease because we truly are in God's hands. We have plenty of exhortations and examples in Scripture that support this position. Indeed, we should trust God and thank Him for all things (e.g., Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:18); we have no promise, though, that God will prevent us from getting sick or dying from a disease in this dispensation of grace. However, I am convinced that the complaints and refusals to obey the mandates were unscriptural and selfish actions taken by many of my fellow brethren, and the perceived persecution was an example of self-generated suffering. That is, it was suffering for the wrong reason. Please let me explain my position.

Regarding the restrictions to our worship, the mandates were not targeting our faith—they included all gatherings over specific numbers of people in enclosed spaces and were temporary. They were instituted for health reasons to slow down the spread of the disease and to protect individuals who were most vulnerable. Although fellowship is important for many reasons, the mandates associated with gatherings during the initial months of the pandemic did not prevent anyone from worshipping God, only the manner in which we are accustomed to worship.

God does not require us to meet in large groups in buildings to worship Him. For example, Paul worshiped and ministered while imprisoned (Acts 16:23-34; 24:1-25; 26:1-29; Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22), and he referred to churches that met in private homes. A small Bible study group meets the scriptural definition of a church. However, if our government made a law forbidding our worship of God, such as when Daniel broke the law by praying, then that would be contrary to the will of God (Acts 4:18-20). In such a case we may need to find some means to worship contrary to the law, fully knowing and accepting the consequences if discovered.

Personally, I did not have our Bible study meet during specific periods of time or required everyone to wear masks when we were allowed to meet, in compliance with mandates as they changed over time. It was a matter of obeying governmental authority as God commands us to do and, even more importantly, taking into consideration the health of the individuals in our group and their families (some of us, because of age or certain health conditions, are particularly vulnerable to contracting viruses). I continued to teach the group through weekly text messages; not everyone had the technological means to join together online as other churches successfully implemented.

Regarding the refusal to take vaccines for faith or religious reasons, please bear with me because I differ with those who do. Again, my fellow brethren who oppose vaccinations point to the Bible to support their position, even though it does not say we should not do things that might prevent us, or others, from getting sick or directly leading to our or their deaths. On the other hand, we should take care of our body because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and Paul encouraged Timothy to drink a little wine because of his frequent ailments (I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:28-30; I Timothy 5:23). Furthermore, Luke the physician accompanied Paul during his ministry implying that Paul may have needed regular medical attention (Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:11).

I consider the response that "the government can't tell me what to do" regarding vaccine mandates is both hypocritical and selfish. Our governing authorities tell us what to do all the time, and God expects us to submit to our authorities as explained in Chapter 10. For example, if we have a vehicle, we are required to register it, have insurance, obtain a valid driver's license, wear our seatbelt, and obey a myriad of driving rules

and regulations, most or all of which are for our safety and the safety of other drivers and pedestrians. If we have a mortgage on a home, we are required to have homeowner's insurance not only for the lender's benefit but for our own financial protection. If we travel by air, we must go through airport security for our own safety and that of our fellow passengers. Think about all the laws we are expected to obey and how many of them are in place for our safety and protection.

I will not go into the history of vaccines and mandates to take vaccines whether they be from our federal, state, or local governmental authorities, school districts, or businesses. However, vaccines have been developed to prevent or slow down the spread of diseases and to help people avoid serious illness or death from targeted diseases. I believe it is hypocritical for believers to fight against mandates for taking vaccines that are intended to help us and our neighbors when at the same time they go to doctors when they are sick or hurt, go to chiropractors when they are in pain, take drugs, vitamins, or minerals (or various concoctions) to get better or to prevent illness, put on sunscreen or bug spray to protect their skin, drink alcohol to relax or feel better, or fight for their gun rights so that they can protect themselves. Please think about these things and whether we are being selfish. Is it really persecution when health mandates are intended to help us?

> **Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.** (Philippians 2:3-4)

Abortion and Homosexuality

Abortion and homosexuality are not related subjects but have been joined in the same context by many Christians and organizations that claim to be Christian. Over the last several decades, individuals and religious entities have worked in the political sphere to outlaw, among other things, all abortions and severely restrict the rights of people who consider themselves to be some type of non-heterosexual person—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, plus other gender identities (LGBTQ+). They consider resistance to their efforts as persecution because they truly believe they are obeying God. Should we really think of it this way, or are we bringing persecution upon ourselves?

Abortion

The legal allowance of abortion in America is viewed by most Christians as an abomination and the primary symptom of sinfulness in this nation. Beginning in the late 1970s, various American Christian organizations including *The Moral Majority*, under the umbrella of the conservative *Christian Right* or *Religious Right* coalition,[6] began a concerted effort to influence political decisions with the intent of abolishing abortion (as well as other *non-Christian* legislation). What came to be known as the *pro-life* movement (against all abortion) was opposed by those who considered themselves to be *pro-choice* (a woman's right to an abortion). This opposition was viewed as persecution against what they viewed as their just and godly cause because of the strongly held belief that Christian morality was under attack.

Under the *Roe v. Wade* decision by the Supreme Court of the United States on January 22, 1973, a legal and safe abortion was declared to be a constitutional right. This decision was overturned under the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision by the Supreme Court on June 24, 2022, leaving abortion legislation up to each individual state. Current and proposed legislation indicates that many states are instituting similar or more restrictive abortion laws to those that were in place before 1973. However, some states have shown that they will allow abortions with certain restrictions. So, legal abortion will remain with us to some extent at least for now.

[6] *Religious Right – Timeline Movement*, The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), 2025.

Brethren, abortion is a very complicated subject. Neither abortion, nor any reference or implication about a woman terminating her pregnancy, is mentioned in the Bible. However, as Christians we have developed a doctrine regarding abortion. God considers us to be conceived in sin; that is, we inherit the sin nature upon conception (Psalm 51:5). He also formed us in in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Therefore, for most of my adult life I was taught and believed that God considers us to be living beings—persons—in the womb and that all abortions are murder. Have we drawn the correct conclusions? I am now certain that we have not.

An unbiased study of Scripture demonstrates that abortion is *not* considered by God to be murder. In the eyes of God, a fetus that miscarries (*an untimely birth*) is as if it had never existed (Job 3:11-16; Ecclesiastes 6:3-5). But should a person who causes a pregnant woman to miscarry (e.g., through a vehicular accident caused by an impaired driver) be charged as a murderer? Many people believe this should be the case. However, the only example of an induced miscarriage in the Bible, described in the Law of Moses, considered the miscarried fetus as a loss of property to be compensated for as such (Exodus 21:22; see also Exodus 22:1-15). These scriptural truths seem to be unknown to, or ignored by, Christians who consider abortion to be murder.

> **O God, shatter their** [*wicked men's*] **teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord. Let them flow away like water that runs off; when he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. Let them be as a snail which melts away** [*has disappearing slime*] **as it goes along, like the miscarriages** [untimely births] **of a woman which never see the sun.** (Psalm 58:6-8)

> **"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely** [her fruit depart from her; *she has a miscarriage*]**, yet there is no injury** [*to the woman*]**, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury** [*to the woman*]**, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."** (Exodus 21:22-25)

From the perspective of living adults, we can understand as King David did that we were conceived in sin (i.e., we sin by nature) and that we were formed by God while in the womb. From God's perspective as revealed in His word, however, our life begins with our first breath (of a viable birth) and ends with our last breath. Those who believe that the Bible says that our life as a person starts at conception apparently are unaware of this scriptural truth.

> **Then the Lord God formed man** [*Adam*] **of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and** [*the*] **man became a living being** [soul]**.** (Genesis 2:7)

> **Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.** (Isaiah 42:5)

> **And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people.** (Genesis 25:8; see also Genesis 25:17; 35:29; 49:33; Acts 5:5, 10)

Abortion, therefore, is not ending the life of a living being. These are concepts unrecognized, and I am afraid vehemently denied, by those who support the *pro-life* movement. I humbly encourage you to read my study **Abortion** that explains how and why I reached these conclusions. Although I recognize that abortion probably is the wrong choice for believers in many cases, I believe that it is not wrong in all cases and cannot be construed as murder based on Scripture. Brethren, abortion is never mentioned or described in Scripture, and we are not in a position to add it in. It appears, therefore, that there is no scriptural basis for trying to

change our nation's laws to end abortion and that the seeming persecution that results from these efforts is false persecution brought on by our own actions.

Under *Roe v. Wade,* and even now, laws that allow abortion do not require or force anyone to have an abortion. Believers have had abortions, but no laws forced them to do so. Many states had laws prohibiting fornication and adultery, but most of those laws have been stricken from the books and are judicially construed to be archaic and no longer enforced where they remain. God has declared that fornication and adultery are sins (e.g., I Corinthians 6:9-10, 18-20), so why are believers not fighting against those sins through the courts as they do abortion? Afterall, many abortions are undertaken to end unwanted pregnancies resulting from fornication or adultery. It would be sobering to know how many brethren have committed those sins.

Please think about the following question: Is it our responsibility as believers to protest or fight against laws that allow abortion, and then consider it to be persecution if we are opposed by those who support abortion? I believe that the answer is "No" to both components of this question. Recall that according to the Ten Commandments murder was to be punished by death. However, the death penalty was also to be applied for adultery (to *both* participants),[7] breaking sabbath requirements, and even striking or cursing one's mother or father. In God's eyes, therefore, these sins are as serious as murder. If God considered abortion to be murder, I believe that He would have clearly said so in Scripture.[8] Consequently, I consider the anti-abortion movement in the name of God to be a tradition of men that brings dishonor to God (Colossians 2:8).

Homosexuality

Unlike abortion, homosexuality is mentioned several times in Scripture. In all cases, it is considered as sin by God. Those who believe that homosexuality is approved or accepted by God must ignore, change, or add to the Bible to support their conclusion. Nevertheless, homosexuality, homosexual acts, and same-sex marriage are protected by current laws. Consequently, supporters of the *Christian Right* have devoted much effort to prevent or overturn laws that protect all forms of homosexuality and LGBTQ+ rights. Unfortunately, they often do so in hypocritical and judgmental ways and use Scripture inappropriately to justify their efforts. In response to their efforts, they have been labeled as *homophobic* (i.e., afraid of those who are homosexual) and consider themselves to be persecuted.

Homosexuality is sin because God, who created us, says it is sin (Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9-11; I Timothy 1:8-11; Leviticus 18:22). Furthermore, under the Law of Moses, God said it was a sin deserving death (Leviticus 20:13). Even before instituting His Law through Moses, God destroyed two cities (Sodom and Gomorrah) because of their homosexuality (Genesis 13:13; 18:20; 19:1-5, 24-29). We need to remember, however, that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under the grace of God.

Because everyone sins, everyone is separated from God and deserves death. However, anyone and everyone who believes that Christ died for our sins is forgiven and alive in Christ. There is no room for judgment or boasting on our part (I Corinthians 1:26-31). Amongst ourselves, we need to teach our fellow brethren that sexual immorality in all forms is sinful and is never justified in the eyes of God, but we need to do so with humility and grace because we all sin and are capable of falling into all types of sin.

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[7] Other sexual sins were also to be punished by death under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 20:11-16).

[8] The Israelites most likely would have known about abortion because it was an accepted practice by Egyptians during the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, as well as in the cultures during the Greek and Roman empires that ruled over Israel (*Ebers Papyrus*, Museum of Contraception and Abortion, Vienna, Austria; *Ancient Abortion History*, abort73.com).

Although homosexuality is now lawful in many countries including America, should believers fight the laws that allow this behavior? Should we mistreat those who we know or think are homosexual (or whatever sexuality or gender other than heterosexual as God intended)? No; instead, we should take the same approach as we would when dealing with any sin in this ungodly world. We need to remember that before we were saved, God considered *all* of us to be dead in sin, living as children of wrath—as the children of Satan deserving God's judgment (Ephesians 2:1-3). We must humbly remember that *all* believers continue to sin (Romans 7:14-25). We are exhorted (commanded) to treat others as we want to be treated—to love our neighbors as ourselves—and leave judgment to God (Romans 12:17-21; 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2; Colossians 3:12-14; I Thessalonians 5:14-15).

Christian Justice

Does God really want us to seek justice for those who undermine Christianity or Christian principles? Our true struggle is not against people or the schemes of man—it is against the spiritual forces of evil (who work through people). If we, personally, are being tempted to sin or are being persecuted for our faith, we are to stand fast and take up the full armor of God to resist evil (Ephesians 6:10-17; I Corinthians 15:58). However, standing fast regarding temptation, sin, or persecution does not mean getting back, getting even, or fighting for our perceived Christian rights. We are not to waiver in our knowledge of the truth or deny who we are in Christ, but we are to leave judgment and retribution to God (Matthew 23:29-35).

> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places** [*realm*]**.** (Ephesians 6:10-12)

> **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:17-21)

Did Christ want to get back at those who rejected, scourged, and crucified Him? No; instead, He asked God that they be forgiven (Luke 23:34; I Peter 2:21-24). Did Stephen want judgment for those who rejected his testimony and stoned him? No; instead, he asked God that they be forgiven (Acts 7:58-60). Did Paul gather all the best lawyers to plead his case and for release from Roman imprisonment? Apparently not, for he accepted the fact that he was in prison for the sake of Christ and for us, and that he faced a death sentence during his last imprisonment (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; II Timothy 1:8; 4:6). Paul knew that those who worked against him and his ministry would be repaid by God (II Timothy 4:14). He also knew the peace of God and the joy of the Lord even when imprisoned and while facing the death sentence (Philippians 1:3-11, 21-25; II Timothy 4:6-8).

> **But even if I** [*Paul*] **am being poured out as a drink offering** [*sacrificial death*] **upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.** (Philippians 2:17-18)

Paul warned the Corinthian brethren against suing one another, for to do so would require them to use the world's system of justice (I Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, if we are not to sue fellow believers, it is not a stretch to say that God does not want us to sue nonbelievers. Why is this? We need to remember that God is

sovereign, that He loves us, and that He is working everything out according to His will (Romans 8:28; Philippians 2:13). Furthermore, we are exhorted to forgive others because we have been forgiven by God through Christ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

How Do We Stand?

Instead of trying to change our city, state, country, or world, how are we representing God and our Lord Jesus Christ in our individual lives? Are we walking worthy of our salvation by faithfully serving God as His children and as ambassadors for Christ? Are we prepared to suffer the consequences if our stand is rejected, whether it results in ridicule, loss of fellowship (with friends, relatives, fellow believers, etc.), loss of a job, or even loss of our life? We should ask the following questions of ourselves and think of other situations where our stand counts, remembering that if we live a godly life for Christ we will suffer.

- Am I ready and willing to share the gospel of salvation with a relative, friend, classmate, or coworker when opportunities arise (Colossians 4:5-6; II Corinthians 5:20)?
- Will I affirm, or deny, my faith if asked (I Peter 3:13-17; I Corinthians 15:58)?
- If someone says that they heal, speak in tongues, or submit to water baptism, or at least profess to believe that these are acceptable practices, am I willing to gracefully disagree and explain why (I Corinthians 13:8; Ephesians 4:4-6; II Timothy 2:15)?[9]
- If asked where I stand on fornication, homosexuality, or any sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage, am I willing to say (humbly and without judgment) that sexual immorality is wrong because God says it is wrong (I Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20)?[10]
- Am I willing to correct (again, humbly and without judgment) and help a Christian friend or relative who is openly engaging in sinful activities (Galatians 6:1; II Thessalonians 3:14-15; II Timothy 3:16-17)?
- If I personally know that someone is falsely accused of something, am I willing to stand up for him or her (II Timothy 4:16-17)?
- Am I prepared to answer a question truthfully, knowing that a lie would enable me to avoid a difficult situation (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9)?[11]
- Am I willing to say "No" to a friend who wants me to watch an inappropriate movie or TV show, go to a bar for a few drinks,[12] try drugs, or do anything I know is wrong (I Corinthians 15:33-34; Ephesians 5:15-18; II Timothy 2:22)?
- Am I willing to say or do the right thing in God's eyes (humbly, yet with conviction), regardless of the consequences (II Corinthians 13:7; Philippians 4:8; I Peter 2:20; 3:13-17)?

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:58)

How Should We Respond to Persecution and Suffering?

Brethren, where do we stop if we try to moralize America, or whichever nation we belong to? All believers will continue to sin until we join our Lord in heaven through death or the rapture. The nonbelieving world will

[9] These subjects are addressed in Chapter 14.

[10] I address sexual immorality as an impediment to our walk in the next chapter.

[11] The example of Rahab indicates that a lie is acceptable to God when it protects someone else according to the will of God (Joshua 2:1-14). I believe that lying to Nazi authorities to protect a Jew or other politically unacceptable person was honored by God.

[12] See Chapter 13 for clarification of this statement.

be sinful until the final judgment by Christ at the great white throne. However, there is much we should, and should not, do when we are faced with true persecution and suffering that result from living and standing for the word of God and for our Lord Jesus Christ in truth and love. We should put our trust in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. We should not shrink back from adversity, give up on the Lord, depend on our own strength, or turn to sin. God revealed to us how He wants us to respond to persecution. We should:

- Expect and accept suffering if we live for Christ because we are living in an evil age (Galatians 1:4; II Timothy 3:12).
- Forgive those who wrong or defraud us (Ephesians 4:32; Romans 12:20-21; I Corinthians 6:7).
- Not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1-2).
- Work quietly with our own hands, lead a quiet life, attend to our own business, behave properly toward nonbelievers, and do good works; furthermore, we should not bring attention to ourselves while doing so (I Thessalonians 4:9-12; II Thessalonians 3:10-13; Galatians 6:9-10; Titus 3:8).
- Be at peace with all people (if possible) and never take revenge, because God will judge His enemies (Romans 12:17-21).
- Conduct ourselves in a manner that does not grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32).
- Be good examples to those around us (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8).
- Speak the truth and not lie (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9).
- Obey those in authority, unless they require us to sin (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2; I Peter 2:13-17).
- Live by the Spirit and not according to the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26).
- Abstain from every form of evil (I Thessalonians 5:21-22).
- Share the gospel of salvation with the lost—loved ones, friends, coworkers, etc. (II Corinthians 5:20).
- Pray for each other (Philippians 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 5:17, 25).
- Be thankful to God in all things, even when being persecuted for standing for God and Christ (I Thessalonians 5:18; Colossians 3:12-17).

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication [*humble entreaty*] **with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell** [think] **on these things.** (Philippians 4:6-8)

Closing Thoughts on Suffering for Christ

This chapter only skims the surface on what the Bible reveals about suffering for the sake of God or our Lord Jesus Christ. There are more examples in Scripture of persecution suffered by people of God. Additionally, there are more examples than addressed herein of perceived persecution that believers bring upon themselves through a misunderstanding or misapplication of Scripture. If we are honest with ourselves, there are many things we believe to be true that cannot be found in, or are contrary, to the word of God. We have come to rely on traditional, but false, teaching just as the people of Israel were doing when our Lord ministered to them (I address this further in Chapter 14).

As believers, especially in America perhaps, we have been conditioned to think that Christianity is under attack and that more and more laws are infringing on our Christian rights. We are taught that persecution for the sake of Christ is a bad thing that we must actively fight against. However, Scripture tells us that true persecution is a promise if we live for Christ and we should consider it as a blessing. Furthermore, fighting for

our Christian rights is unscriptural because, as believers, we do not have Christian rights in this world. We are children of God and not children of the god of this world. We are not even of this world; instead, we are citizens of heaven and, therefore, ambassadors for Christ in this world.

If we are suffering persecution for the sake of Christ and for living according to the revealed will of God, then we should be thankful to God and praise Him. We must be careful, however, to examine Scripture and our motives and actions to make sure that we, indeed, are suffering for the right reasons. If we are not suffering for Christ, on the other hand, we need to evaluate our lives to see if we are living in a manner that is in conformance with the world instead of walking worthy of our salvation.

> **And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?** (Romans 8:28-31)
>
> **For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline** [a sound mind]**. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me** [*Paul*] **His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.** (II Timothy 1:7-9)
>
> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.** (Ephesians 6:10-11)

Chapter 13

Roadblocks to a Worthy Walk

But I [*Paul*] **say, walk by the Spirit, and you** [*brethren*] **will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.** (Galatians 5:16-17)

What Hinders Us?

Let us be honest with ourselves, brethren. Generally, we struggle at walking worthy of our salvation. In the previous chapter we looked at the consequences of a worthy walk. Perhaps we shy away from living for Christ because we do not really want to suffer for Him. I believe that there is much more to it, however. What is holding us back from living in a manner that we ought to live?

Paul called the Corinthian believers, who he dearly loved (I Corinthians 16:24; II Corinthians 2:4), carnal (fleshly) babes because their sinfulness in attitude and actions prevented them from being able to handle the truth (I Corinthians 3:1-3). When reading both letters, it appears that their pride was the root of most of their spiritual problems (e.g., I Corinthians 3:18-23; 4:7; 5:1-2; II Corinthians 5:11-12; 10:12, 17-18). He called the Galatians foolish because they listened to false teaching and became convinced that they could better serve God by placing themselves back under practices of the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:1-5; 4:9-11; 6:12-13). Unfortunately, Paul could call the church today carnal and foolish. Why would I even suggest such a thing?

Basically, I perceive that there are two main reasons we come up short of a worthy walk. Like the Corinthian brethren, it is not uncommon for us to let sin be master over us. Also, like the Galatian brethren, we often cling to following the religious traditions of men instead of believing and obeying the truth of God. To some degree, at least, I think that the latter problem easily leads to the former issue; that is, sinful actions commonly result from doctrinal error.

In this chapter I will present my perspective on some of the ways that we let sin become master over us. Then, in the next chapter, we will look at specific doctrines commonly accepted and taught in Christian denominations and churches today that are contrary to sound doctrine—the truth that God has revealed to us in this dispensation of His grace.

How We Should Not Walk

We have seen what God expects us to do in response to being saved by His grace; that is, how to walk worthy of our calling. In many of the passages that explain our walk, we also see the opposite—how we should *not* walk—that I often mentioned for comparison purposes. Consequently, although our focus here will be on the latter, some of the passages regarding how we should walk will be repeated.

This is not presented as judgment. As stated in the beginning of this book, I admit that my teaching is also preaching to myself. We need to take an honest look at ourselves to see if we are being good ambassadors for Christ. Are we conducting our lives in such a way that represents Him in the proper light, or are we bringing dishonor to Him and God our Father?

In the study about walking in love (Chapter 5), we looked at the opposite of doing so. The same goes for walking with humility, where pride is examined (Chapter 6). The fruit of the Spirit, presented in Chapter 7, is the opposite of the deeds of the flesh. It is not left to us to figure out what we should do and not do as believers.

Our focus will be on commands in Paul's letters because, as is the case with how to walk worthy of our salvation, commands regarding how not to walk are straightforward. That is, they do not need interpretation to understand them because they were not written as prophecies or parables in veiled language. To explain the seriousness of disregarding God's commands to the Corinthians, Paul referred to Israel's history regarding examples of what the brethren needed to stop doing. We should heed those examples and Paul's warning.

> **Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they** [*the Israelites in the wilderness*] **also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.** (I Corinthians 10:6-13)

Commands to Not Walk in Sin

There are many commands in Paul's letters regarding not walking in sin. Most, or perhaps all, of them refer to sinful thoughts and actions that are also addressed in some form throughout Scripture. Please note that in the following passages, commands against sinful behavior are nearly always contrasted with what we should do instead. For some of them, the contrast is in the immediate context of the passage if we consider the preceding or following verses.

As with the commands regarding how we should walk, the commands about how we should not walk overlap. One passage might provide a long list of the things we should not do, while others focus on specific sinful actions or thoughts. The following headings, often related, were developed from the referenced passages to help with understanding the magnitude of some of the problems that we believers have with walking in sin. The sinfulness of sin is exposed from every angle in Paul's letters and throughout Scripture. We are left without excuse regarding what God considers to be sin.

Do Not Walk According to the Flesh

> **But I** [*Paul*] **say, walk by** [in] **the** [*Holy*] **Spirit, and you** [*brethren*] **will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if** [*because*] **you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law** [*of Moses*]**. Now the deeds** [works] **of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality** [adultery, fornication]**, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities** [hatred]**, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom** [*heavenly realm*] **of God.** (Galatians 5:16-21)

> **Or do you not know that the unrighteous** [*nonbelievers*] **will not inherit the kingdom** [*heavenly realm*] **of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you**

were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the [*Holy*] **Spirit of our God.** (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

These passages summarize the deeds of the flesh. The deeds of the flesh are the natural thoughts and actions that are done according to the desire of the flesh. If we believers nurture the flesh—our old nature—we will sin according to the flesh. In Galatians 5:19-23, the deeds (plural) of the flesh are contrasted with the fruit (singular—derived from one source) of the Spirit (see also Colossians 3:5-17). If we walk according to the flesh, sin will dominate our lives. If we walk according to the Spirit, however, the nature of Christ will work through us as manifested by the fruit of the Spirit; we will not be controlled by sin (Romans 6:12-19).

The deeds of the flesh are all sins that are addressed directly, or indirectly, in the Law of Moses, along with corresponding consequences. For the most part, the Law of Moses as written in the Old Testament addressed outward expressions of sin and the corresponding consequences. Although it did not specifically say so, Jesus pointed out that the Law also covered the inward intent that leads to those actions (Matthew 5:27-28).

Prior to believing the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins and that He was buried and raised up for us (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 1:13-14)—all people have only one nature: the sin nature. Apart from salvation God considers us to be dead in sin (unrighteous) and children of wrath—those who deserve the judgment of God (Ephesians 2:1-3). Upon believing the gospel of salvation, God forgives our sins, adopts us as His own children, and considers us to be in Christ at His own side in the heavens (Romans 8:1, 14-16; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:1-3). We are not only in Christ, but He is in us—we inherit His nature (Romans 8:9-11; Colossians 1:27). However, God does not remove the sinful nature when He saves us. We will continue to sin and endure the internal conflict or battle between our two natures (Galatians 5:16-17; Romans 7:14-25) until physical death or until we meet our Lord at the rapture.

I must emphasize that Galatians 5:19-21 and I Corinthians 6:9-10 are *not* saying that believers who commit any of the deeds of the flesh are not actually saved or could lose their salvation. Brethren, because we still have the sin nature within us, we are capable of committing any and all of the listed sins and more, and yet by the grace of God our salvation is sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14; I Corinthians 6:11). What the Holy Spirit through Paul is saying is that believers should stop doing the very things that God will judge nonbelievers—the unrighteous—for doing (Colossians 3:5-7). Because of our position in Christ and despite our continued sinfulness, God considers all believers to be in or led by the Spirit; therefore, we should live accordingly (Galatians 5:25; Romans 8:1-14). Believers have a choice whether to present their bodies as instruments of unrighteousness or instruments of righteousness—God wants us to do the latter (Romans 12:1-2).

What shall we [*believers*] **say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** (Romans 6:1-2)

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present [yield] **yourselves to God as those alive from the dead** [*being dead in sin*]**, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** (Romans 6:12-14)

Believers are led by the Spirit and are not under the Law of Moses—we are no longer condemned by the law of sin (Romans 7:21-25). Through the Law we know what sin is, and the desire of the flesh—the sin nature within us—causes us to sin (Romans 5:20; 7:7-8). It is because of this that the Law condemned us in our sin

and killed us (Romans 7:9-11; II Corinthians 3:5-6). Thankfully, if we believe what Christ did for us at the cross, we are no longer condemned to death in our sin but are alive in Christ (Romans 8:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-7).

Do Not Be Conformed to the World

> **Therefore I** [*Paul*] **urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable** [*well-pleasing*] **to God, which is your spiritual service of worship** [reasonable service]**. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove** [*to yourselves*] **what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** (Romans 12:1-2)

> **Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals** [*character*]**."** (I Corinthians 15:33)

> **Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh** [*the body*] **and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** (II Corinthians 7:1)

Do we fit in with the world and its ways well enough such that no one would know that we are members of the body of Christ and His ambassadors? Brethren, sin begets sin. If we associate with overtly sinful people and activities, we will likely become just as sinful because our sin nature is powerful. Such examples are provided throughout Scripture. We are exhorted to assess ourselves and to consciously avoid or flee from sin so as not to be conformed to or consumed by it (I Corinthians 6:18-20; 10:14; I Timothy 6:8-11; II Timothy 2:22; 3:1-5).

> **Test yourselves** [*prove to yourselves*] **to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?** (II Corinthians 13:5)

Do Not Walk as Nonbelievers

> **So this I** [*Paul*] **say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles** [*nonbelievers*] **also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness** [blindness] **of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness** [*a continual lust for more*]**. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted** [is corrupt] **in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.** (Ephesians 4:17-24)

> **Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent** [*pure*]**, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.** (Philippians 2:14-15)

This command is similar to the previous one, providing some more explanation about why and how we should separate ourselves from the sinfulness of the nonbelieving world in which we live. Do we appear as lights in the world, living the truth of God?

Do Not Walk According to Darkness

> **The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity** [*immorality*] **and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on** [*clothe yourselves with*] **the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to** [*to gratify*] **its lusts.** (Romans 13:12-14)

> **Do not be bound together** [unequally yoked] **with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?** (II Corinthians 6:14)

> **Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose** [reprove] **them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them** [*disobedient people*] **in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."** (Ephesians 5:11-14)

In Chapter 7, I contrasted the command to walk as children of light with walking according to darkness. To walk according to darkness is to live according to our sin nature. I have found that it is not uncommon for fellow brethren to *not* want to hear about how they should walk as believers, perhaps because they do not want to be accountable for their sinful behavior. It seems, unfortunately, that the guilty pleasures of life often are more attractive to us than living for Christ.

Do Not Seek Revenge

> **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:17-21)

> **I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide** [*a dispute*] **between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.** (I Corinthians 6:5-8)

I am afraid that believers have been conditioned by the cultural norm to seek justice for real or perceived wrongs perpetrated against us. In my youth I watched westerns on TV that glorified the *good guys* over the *bad guys*, and the disputes were often settled by fists, guns, or a noose, i.e., instant justice. In fact, through our culture we have been exposed to revenge as a way of life. We have been indoctrinated to believe that revenge through some means of payback, including lawsuits or even violence, is our right. This is not God's way, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. Do we believe Him?

Do Not Resist Authority

> **Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists** [*rebels against*]

authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

I addressed this command in Chapter 10. I perceive that believers in general have difficulty understanding and obeying it. Even seemingly inconsequential things like not obeying posted speed limits show our disregard for governing authority. Disobeying *little* laws makes it easier for us to justify disobeying *bigger* laws. This attitude spills over to our spiritual life. The line between the truth and lies, or between sound doctrine and false doctrine, becomes blurred. We will find (or others will notice) that we are walking according to the flesh instead of the Spirit.

Do Not be Proud

Now these things, brethren, I [*Paul*] **have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.** (I Corinthians 4:6)

Let no one seek his own good, but that [*the good*] **of his neighbor.** (I Corinthians 10:24)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

I contrasted the command for a humble walk to pride and some of its pitfalls in Chapter 6. The Corinthian brethren had a particular problem with pride. Paul did not mention suffering for Christ on their part,[1] so perhaps they blended in well with (i.e., embraced) the sinful culture of Corinth that was heavily influenced or characterized by idol worship, sexual immorality, and wealth. Are we too proud to grasp the truth of God and realize that it applies to us? Are we focused on ourselves and our own desires?

Do Not be Spiritually Immature

And I [*Paul*]**, brethren, could not speak to you** [*Corinthian believers*] **as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh** [carnal]**, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?** (I Corinthians 3:1-4)

Brethen, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. (I Corinthians 14:20)

Peter spoke of longing for the pure, or sincere, milk of the word of God so that the believers could grow in their salvation (I Peter 2:1-3). Paul, however, used the analogy of *milk* in a different way to the Corinthian brethren who were carnal in their actions and were thinking like children. They were walking in the flesh and unable to understand the deeper truths of God's word. The writer of the book of Hebrews expressed the same

[1] When Paul was writing to the Corinthian brethren about *sharing* in the sufferings of Paul and his coworkers (II Corinthians 1:3-7), the context does not seem to indicate that they were actually experiencing persecution as were Paul and his coworkers. Instead, Paul *hoped* that they would share in actual suffering for Christ so that they, too, could experience the comfort of God. Paul thanked God for what He did for the Corinthians but not for their faithfulness in their service for Christ (I Corinthians 1:1-9; compare with Philippians 1:1-11; I Thessalonians 1:1-10).

perspective to the Jewish brethren who were looking forward to their promised kingdom; they, too, were spiritually immature (Hebrews 5:11-14).

I was saved by the grace of God when I was a child of eight years old. For the next ten years I attended conservative and evangelical denominational churches. I learned many Bible stories from the Old Testament and New Testament about faith and the love of God, and about the life of Jesus and how He died for my sins. One could say that I had a good, and solid, Bible foundation. I believed God and His word and knew that I was saved.

However, when I was 18 years old, God began opening my eyes to the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of His grace. Looking back, I realize that until that time I had experienced a regular diet of *milk* but had just begun learning the *meat* of the word. It was amazing as the manifold wisdom of God began to unfold before my eyes (Ephesians 3:1-12). I started to devour Scripture and many of its truths that I had never heard about before, and I wanted to live as an ambassador for Christ. My maturation as a believer began at that time and hopefully continues to this day and beyond.

Generally speaking, I am afraid that believers today are much like the Corinthians—babes in Christ who cannot handle the meat of God's word. We are too caught up in our own pride and in worldly thinking and actions. Too often we close our eyes and ears to the truth of God's word and rely on traditions of men. We consider those who teach, through Scripture, how we ought to walk worthy of our salvation as judgmental. Instead, our desire should be to grow up as believers and become spiritually mature.

> **When I** [*Paul*] **was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.** (I Corinthians 13:11)

Do Not Live According to Our Own Truth or Righteousness

> **You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed** [*clearly set forth*] **as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the** [*Holy*] **Spirit by the works of the Law** [*of Moses*]**, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** (Galatians 3:1-3)

> **However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:8-11)

> **You** [*Galatian believers*] **were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him** [*God*] **who calls you** [*called you to salvation*]**. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.** (Galatians 5:7-9)

We just saw that the Corinthian brethren were spiritually immature because of their pride and carnality. Here we see how exceedingly frustrated Paul was about the Galatian brethren with whom he had spent much time teaching the word of God.[2] Why was this? The Galatians had succumbed to false teaching. Paul had taught them the gospel of God's grace, but they were being deceived by Jewish false brethren (nonbelievers)

[2] Paul's trips to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, all cities that apparently were in the region or province of Galatia, are recorded in Acts 14:1-23; 16:1-8; 18:22-23; see also I Corinthians 16:1; II Timothy 3:10-12). Paul was stoned and presumed dead in Lystra (Acts 14:8, 19-20).

who were trying to get them to obey the Law of Moses, or at least parts of it (Galatians 3:1-5, 10-14; 4:21; 6:12-13). It is likely that they were attracted to the ordinances regarding observances of days, weeks, months, and years required by the Law of Moses because they had observed similar things as part of their idol worship prior to being saved. False teaching had corrupted their faith—they were now following their own truth.

> **So have I** [*Paul*] **become your enemy by telling you the truth? They** [*false teachers*] **eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out** [*from the truth*] **so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.** (Galatians 4:16-20)

I will address this further in the next chapter, but false teaching and traditions are pervasive in our Christian denominations and many of our independent churches today. We must examine what we are being taught and compare it with Scripture. Furthermore, we must heed Paul's warning to the Galatian brethren about disobeying or corrupting the word of God (Galatians 1:6-9).

Do Not Speak Sinfully Toward Others

> **But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath** [*rage*]**, malice, slander** [blasphemy, *evil speaking*]**, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.** (Colossians 3:8-10)

Speaking the truth with one another is addressed in Chapter 7. Speaking lies or abusively to or about one another is a deed of the flesh and prevents us from walking worthy of our salvation. The Bible has much to say about how our tongue can be exceedingly evil (e.g., Psalm 52:1-4; Proverbs 17:4; 26:28; James 3:5-10). Our own sinfulness, including our inner rage, contempt, racism, hypocrisy, boasting, etc., is revealed through our words and the way they are spoken.

Oftentimes, I do not think we even realize how offensive or destructive our words are toward or about others. Is that joke we said or laughed at harmless, or was it derogatory—who did we make fun of? Was not our gossip or our lie we said to or about someone intended to embarrass or hurt someone? We need to look inward and weigh our words carefully. Are we really setting aside our old sinful self and putting on our new self in Christ?

> **Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry** [*at sin or sinfulness*]**, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath** [*rage*] **and anger and clamor** [*contentious quarreling*] **and slander** [evil speaking] **be put away from you, along with all malice** [*ill will, meanness*]**. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other; just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:25-32)

But [*sexual*] **immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints** [*believers*]**; and there must be no filthiness** [*obscene*] **and silly** [foolish] **talk, or coarse jesting** [*joking*]**, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.** (Ephesians 5:3-4)

For you were called to freedom [*from the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses*]**, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word** [*command*]**, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.** (Galatians 5:13-15)

Do Not be Undisciplined

For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. (II Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Busybodies are nosy people who are known for trying to help others with situations in which they are not necessarily welcome or needed. In my experience, they are usually oblivious to their own drawbacks and come across as self-righteous. I had a coworker who openly professed to be a Christian, but who was not respected by his fellow workers because he was always offering advice to others about their work and personal matters, including their salvation. He did this while being known for not getting his own work done on time or in a quality manner.

Brethren, we should share the gospel of salvation with others as opportunities present themselves because we are ambassadors for Christ. But how would I expect my testimony to be received if I was known as an undisciplined, hypocritical person who is not respected by those who know me? At best, I may simply be ignored—why would they want what I have? At worst, I may cause others to blaspheme God because of my attitude and actions (Romans 2:24).

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly [walk honestly] **toward outsiders** [*nonbelievers*] **and not be in any need.** (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

For even though I [*Paul*] **am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.** (Colossians 2:5-7)

Do Not Abuse Alcohol

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation [*debauchery, corruption*]**, but be filled with the Spirit.** (Ephesians 5:18)

Do not get drunk with wine. This is a straightforward command that I believe covers inebriation by any alcoholic beverage because wine, beer, and liquor have been with us for a very long time. The abuse of alcohol,

as well as illegal or prescription drugs, is not uncommon among believers. Our culture seems to revolve around drinking for companionship, to celebrate something, to watch sporting events, to relax or feel good, to forget our struggles in life, etc. Drinking too much alcohol can easily lead to alcoholism, which is an addiction and not a disease. However, alcoholism, or drinking any amount of alcohol for some individuals, can lead to a host of diseases and cancers, many of which are a direct cause of death.

Besides the above verse, other verses included in this chapter identify drunkenness as sin—a deed of the flesh (Galatians 5:21; Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 5:11; 6:10). Drunkenness, or just drinking too much, is also addressed throughout the Bible (e.g., I Samual 25:36-38; Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35; I Thessalonians 5:7-8).

So, is drinking alcohol always wrong? For most of us, no. Before the advent of treating drinking water, one can imagine the *bugs* and diseases carried in the water because of unsanitary conditions. It was likely known in past ages that alcoholic beverages were safer to drink than water, and we now know that the alcohol fermentation process kills bacteria and viruses in the water. That is probably the reason why Paul encouraged Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake and frequent ailments (I Timothy 5:23). However, Paul warned others not to overindulge in or become addicted to wine (I Timothy 3:2-3, 8-9; Titus 1:7; 2:3).

> **Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.** (Proverbs 20:1)

Even now, drinking limited amounts of alcohol can be a health benefit for some people, it may be safer to drink than local water, or it may just taste good (Psalm 104:14-15). For some of us, however, even one drink can impair our senses such that it is unsafe to drive or do other activities. Drinking too much is illegal when driving a vehicle while exceeding a specified blood alcohol content. If we drink to get drunk or even a *buzz*, however, we are no longer sober and are disobeying God.

> **Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals** [*character*]**." Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.** (I Corinthians 15:33-34)

The context of being sober minded in the above passage is not directly related to drinking, although Paul referred to words of the prophet Isaiah in the previous verse when he said, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" that is associated with drinking wine (I Corinthians 15:32; Isaiah 22:13). Being sober-minded means to be clear-minded or in control of oneself—disciplined. We cannot be as such when under the effects of alcohol or other substances that adversely impact our thinking or senses. Brethren, drunkenness allows our old sin nature to take control, preventing us from walking worthy of our salvation and causing us to misrepresent our Lord Jesus Christ. It is far better to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

> **Therefore if** [*because*] **you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking** [*set your heart on*] **the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** (Colossians 3:1-3)

Brethren, we need to seriously ask ourselves *why* we drink alcohol. Are we dependent on it in any way? Is it a replacement for something or to fill a void in our life? Furthermore, we need to take into consideration the atmosphere of our drinking. If we go to a bar to drink alone or with our friends, would anyone there ever suspect that we are ambassadors for Christ, or would we be accepted as a worldly person like everyone else? Whether in a bar or anywhere else, drinking with a known alcoholic (or someone who appears to be adversely affected by alcohol) or in front of a recovering alcoholic is immensely selfish and even dangerous to the other person. Doing so shows that we do not really care for them or put their interests before our own.

Do Not be Greedy

> **For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a** [the] **root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing** [*craving*] **for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.** (I Timothy 6:7-11)

As I understand the sinfulness of this world in which we live, it seems that two deeds of the flesh are the main drivers: money and sex. The two are often intertwined, but I want to briefly focus on *the love of money* here, and hope that it causes all of us to evaluate our own lives and desires.

Money itself is not the issue, for we need to work to make money; it is part of living a disciplined life. How we make money is important, however, because there are so many sinful ways of acquiring it. That is why there are common adages about doing an *honest day's work* and making an *honest living* (see also Ephesians 4:28; I Thessalonians 4:9-12; Proverbs 10:9; 11:3). It is the *love* of money that causes us so many problems.

We seem to be driven to wanting more, which is contrary to the command of being content with what we have. Too many of us not only want *to keep up with the Joneses*, but to have more than them. It appears to be a matter of pride over need. We like to demonstrate our worth through the things we have, even if we cannot afford them without going into debt. We may even go into debt to buy or do something because we have convinced ourselves that we *owe it to ourselves* or *deserve it*. To get more of what we crave requires more money, and that is where the problem begins.

So how do we get more money for the things we do not really need but want? For some, it is through doing extra work. We have already seen that working with our own hands (earning an honest living) is something we are commanded to do; it is the right thing to do. We need to take care of our family and sometimes that requires an extra job (or, maybe we can live successfully and contentedly without that extra job). However, working more than is necessary to get the job done[3] or to supply our needs can be unhealthy to ourselves and our relationships. Our focus is on work (e.g., being a workaholic) instead of living our lives as we ought. Sometimes, working too much is a symptom of our pride—we feel we are better than others or consider ourselves to be indispensable. Sometimes, we work too much to get away from something, such as difficulties at home or to avoid meeting other responsibilities.

Perhaps the most common symptom of our love of money today is to gain it through gambling. For the average person, it used to be that to gamble one would have to go to a casino in a state or city that legalized gambling (I am showing my age here). Now, however, any adult can legally gamble in a multitude of ways: raffles, bingo, lottery tickets, computer games, sports betting, *get-rich-quick* schemes, playing the market, etc. In many cases, we can do it right on our phone. In every case, money must be spent in the hope of making more money or gaining something of greater value through chance. Often, however, gambling puts us in debt that can lead us into a host of problems. For example, the craving for more money can lead us to do other sinful things, including lying or illegal activities, to acquire it.

[3] From my own experience I know that it is sometimes (or even frequently) necessary to work extra hours—whether compensated or not—to get the job done on time or in the quality manner that is required.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Ephesians 4:28)

Does any form of gambling honor God or our Lord Jesus Christ? No, not even if it is done to raise money *for the Lord* or *for the ministry*. On the contrary, it impedes our walk as believers and tarnishes (or nullifies) our testimony to those around us. Furthermore, it can destroy our lives and the lives of those who depend on us. Scripture compares greed with idol worship—we become servants to the love of money. We need to endeavor to be content, and thankful, with what God has provided for us (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion [inordinate affection]**, evil desire** [*lust*]**, and greed, which amounts to** [is] **idolatry.** (Colossians 3:5)

Not that I [*Paul*] **speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him** [Christ] **who strengthens me.** (Philippians 4:11-13)

Do Not be Sexually Immoral

Flee [*sexual*] **immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.** (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

Today, and perhaps always, morality is a very subjective concept. It is shaped not only by generally accepted norms but also by personal convictions about what is considered to be right or wrong. Consequently, a behavior or action that is often held to be immoral by most people can easily be justified in our mind as the right thing to do under the circumstances or even as normal behavior. We rely on our own truth to the point where lying, stealing, or being hateful toward others become acceptable. But is this how God defines right and wrong? Through His word God has revealed to us exactly what He expects us to do and not to do as His children and as ambassadors for Christ.

Although society judges morality and immorality according to all kinds of behavior, immorality in the Bible is always described in the context of sexual immorality.[4] Consider the many passages we have looked at that contain lists of sinful activities or attitudes, and immorality is identified separately from other deeds of the flesh that we are to avoid or stop doing (e.g., I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:16-21; Colossians 3:5-11). Brethren, we are commanded to not be sexually immoral.

The Bible has much to say about sex and sexual immorality. Just as in the past, believers today are prone to sexual immorality. It is to the point where sexual immorality is often not even considered as such. It is no wonder because sex and sexual inuendo seem to always be present and directed right at us, especially through media and entertainment. However, sexual immorality is a major roadblock to walking worthy in Christ, and the subject deserves some extra attention. Please consider my perspective and prayerfully read the verses I use to support it.

[4] In the book of Revelation, the future evil city of Babylon is described as a whore with whom the kings of the earth commit fornication or immorality (Revelation 17:2-5; 18:1-3; 19:2). Therefore, even though this description of immorality does not mean literal sexual immorality, the kings' political association with Babylon is likened to sexual immorality.

Sex as God Intended

Sexual intimacy is a wonderful gift of God. This gift of God is limited, however, to specific conditions that many people, including believers, choose not to abide by or simply ignore. What are these conditions, and why does God consider them to be so important?

From the beginning, God intended and specified that sexual intercourse was to occur between a married man and his one wife. Yes, there is much polygamy in the Old Testament. We have numerous examples of men, including men of God, who had multiple wives (at the same time) and had children through them and their hand maidens (their wives' bondservants). To me, this demonstrates the sinfulness of men (e.g., dominance, arrogance, lust, lack of self-control, etc.) and their selfish disregard for the instructions of God.[5] It also shows that our sinfulness cannot thwart the plan of God and that He often uses it to accomplish His will. But who are we to test the will and grace of God by disobeying Him (Psalm 78:17-22; Matthew 4:7; Romans 6:1-2)?

Brethren, marriage and sex are extremely important to God. God made Adam and Eve specifically for each other.[6] He made them as husband and wife, and Adam *knew* Eve (Genesis 4:1—KJV); that is, he had sexual intercourse with her. God used them as our example for a man to leave his parents and be as one flesh (joined as one body—I Corinthians 6:16) with his wife—his one wife (Genesis 2:24). With Adam and Eve God established His intent—His righteous will—for His children to set them apart from the rest of mankind. According to God:

- Marriage is between one man and one woman (I Timothy 3:2, 12).
- The man and woman are to be virgins until after they are married (Luke 1:26-27; I Thessalonians 4:3-7; I Corinthians 6:13-20; 7:1-5). See also the section below about fornication.
- We are not to defile God's institution of marriage (whether we are married or not) by committing fornication or adultery (Hebrews 13:4).
- The marriage relationship is compared to the relationship between Christ and His church—the members of His body (Ephesians 5:22-25, 28-31; I Corinthians 6:15; 12:12-13). God considers a husband and wife to be one flesh, just as all believers are one in Christ; we are in Him and He is in us (Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:27).

Sexual intimacy between a husband and his wife is how God designed us for reproduction. Although conception and the growth of the embryo to a fully developed baby is fully explained by medical science, I consider the entire process as a miracle. A child—the product of the physical union between a man and woman—is a gift of God. However, conceiving a child is not the only reason for our physical union. The love and pleasure we experience during sexual intimacy is also a gift of God; He did not intend sex to be solely for procreation as some teach (e.g., Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 4:1-5; 5:10-14; I Corinthians 7:1-5).

Can sexual intercourse or other sexual intimacy between a husband and wife be sinful? Yes, it can. God intended sex to be an expression of love between a husband and wife. That means that it should be consensual and based on a relationship of respect and selflessness. The wife's body belongs to the husband, and the husband's body belongs to the wife. Our desire should be for each other (Song of Solomon 7:10-13). We (men

[5] Jesus never commanded nor implied that men could or should have more than one wife, and polygamy is not mentioned or condoned in the New Testament.

[6] See my study **Adam** that presents a perspective that is not traditionally taught in our churches.

in particular) should not force our will on our spouse to satisfy our *needs*, for that mindset is not only selfish but is similar to rape.

> **The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.** (I Corinthians 7:3-5)

When Sex is Sin

Are we living up to God's plan regarding sex? Unfortunately, our sexual behavior often shows our disregard and disobedience of God's instructions and intentions for us. Let us look at what God says about fornication and adultery.[7]

Fornication

Fornication is an old English word, still sometimes used today, describing pre-marital sex. It sounds like a nasty or judgmental word—it makes sex bad—so it no longer has common usage. A couple of definitions are as follows:

> "Sexual intercourse between a man and woman not married to each other." (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1973 edition)

> "Consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other." (merriam-webster.com)

Depending on the context, the word *fornication* in the Bible, which is most prevalent in the KJV, may be referring to sex between two unmarried persons or to sexual immorality in general. That is, it can include adultery, rape, any type of homosexuality, prostitution, pornography, and inordinate affection (lust), all of which have been with us since the beginning (Romans 1:18-27).

It is not uncommon for many people to begin their sexual experiences during their teenage years. If they remained virgins through high school, they often lose their virginity before getting married. Many of those who do not get married for one reason or another have sexual relationships regardless. I am not so naïve to not realize that many of us believers fall into one or more of these categories. What does Scripture say about fornication?

> **I wrote you in my letter not to associate with** [*sexually*] **immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother** [*believer or professing believer*] **if he is an immoral person** [fornicator]**, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.** (I Corinthians 5:9-11)

> **Or do you not know that the unrighteous** [*nonbelievers*] **will not inherit the kingdom** [*heavenly realm*] **of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate**

[7] See my study **Abortion**, from which this explanation was drawn, because fornication and adultery often lead to a decision to have an abortion. Like many of my other studies, **Abortion** presents a perspective not traditionally taught in our churches.

[*by perversion*]**, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.** (I Corinthians 6:9-11)

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality [fornication]**, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.** (I Corinthians 6:13)

Flee immorality [fornication]**. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.** (I Corinthians 6:18)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But immorality [fornication] **or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints** [*believers*]**; and there must be no filthiness and silly** [foolish] **talk, or coarse jesting** [*e.g., dirty jokes*]**, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom** [*heavenly realm*] **of Christ and God.** (Ephesians 5:1-5)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality [fornication]**, impurity, passion** [inordinate affection]**, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience** [*nonbelievers*]**, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.** (Colossians 3:5-7)

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality [fornication]**; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel** [*body*] **in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles** [*nonbelievers*] **who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us** [*believers*] **for the purpose of** [*sexual*] **impurity, but in sanctification** [holiness]**. So, he who rejects this in not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.** (I Thessalonians 4:3-8)

The above passages were written by Paul to believers—fellow members of the body of Christ. He did so because fornication was a problem among brethren then, as it is now. There was, and is, no intention in his exhortations to change the behavior of the world (nonbelievers) because it is their nature to sin (Romans 1:18-32; 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:14; 5:9-13).[8] However, he used his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ to exhort fellow believers to maintain their own bodies in moral sanctity, which is possible because we have the Holy Spirit working within us (Romans 8:9-17; I Corinthians 6:9-11).

It is a prevailing thought that abstinence is a hopeless objective because we are sexual beings. I agree that we cannot expect unmarried nonbelievers (those of the world) to abstain from sexual activity. I hope that it is evident from these passages, however, that God has always considered fornication to be wrong (sinful). How many believers justify their sexual behavior by saying that they love the other person and plan to marry him or her. It is still wrong, for both participants, because we are exhorted to possess our own bodies in sanctification and honor and to flee (avoid, or run away from) immorality. To compound the problem, how

[8] I must confess that I have known nonbelievers who demonstrate far better moral integrity—sexual behavior and otherwise—than fellow brethren, which is a sad commentary on how we conduct our lives as children of God and ambassadors for Christ.

many times is a sexual relationship conducted that did not end in marriage to the other person? Let us demonstrate some self-discipline. Besides being obedient to God, waiting until marriage before engaging in sex is an example of true love, respect, and commitment to each other. Furthermore, if both partners wait until marriage before having sex, then there is no fear of getting pregnant or acquiring sexually transmitted diseases.

Adultery

Adultery is probably understood by most people. It is commonly defined as sexual intercourse or intimacy between people when one or both are married to someone else. The power of the word is taken away when we refer to such a relationship as *an affair*, but it is adultery, nevertheless. What does Scripture say about adultery?

"You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14)

The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself [his own soul] **does it.** (Proverbs 6:32)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous [*nonbelievers*] **will not inherit the kingdom** [*heavenly realm*] **of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate** [*by perversion*]**, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.** (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

As with fornication, adultery has always been sinful in the eyes of God. We should be thankful that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under grace in this dispensation of the grace of God. Although adultery is still wrong and just as despised by God, He does not want us to put adulterers to death (the Law of Moses required that *both* the man and woman be put to death—Leviticus 20:10). Please refer to the narrative on the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, near the end of Chapter 4.

Perhaps the most well-known example of adultery in the Bible is the account of King David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah who was fighting for Israel in David's army (II Samuel 11:1 – 12:23). David not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, but she became pregnant. David then tried to make the pregnancy look like it was the result of intercourse between Bathsheba and her husband who David had ordered home from battle. That attempt at coverup did not work, however (because of Uriah's sense of duty to his soldiers), so David successfully schemed to have Uriah killed in battle so that there would be no proof that he was not the father of Bathsheba's unborn child.

Consequently, David, the King of Israel, was guilty of adultery, deceit, *and* murder. As required by the Law of Moses, David and Bathsheba should have been put to death for adultery (with a second death sentence for David for murder). When confronted with his sins by the prophet Nathan, David repented to God and, by the grace of God, he did not face his consequence under the Law. However, his son died soon after birth because of God's judgment against David for his sin, as prophesied by Nathan. There are many things we can learn from this example, one of them being that we should not commit adultery, and another is that one sin led to more sins.

Adultery encompasses more than the sexual act. Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28 that the intent of our heart (i.e., looking at, or thinking about, another woman with sexual desires—lust) is just as sinful as the act itself. However, the Law of Moses did not demand punishment or restitution for sinful intent. This should cause us, though, to consider our own sinful intentions even if we do not carry them out—sinful intentions are still sin.

Sexual Immorality Summarized

We are repeatedly warned to discontinue living according to the flesh and its many sinful deeds. Lists of such deeds nearly always begin with sexual immorality (e.g., I Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:17-19; 5:3-6; Colossians 3:5-9). As believers, we need to honestly evaluate our own thoughts and desires to see if we are being sexually immoral in any way. For example, how do we think about a friend, neighbor, or coworker; what kind of TV shows or movies do we watch; what kind of books or magazines do we read; what do we search for and watch on the Internet; etc.? If we are, we need to flee immorality in whatever ways it presents itself and reset our minds on what is right and true (Philippians 4:8-9; Colossians 3:1-3, 12-17; Romans 12:1-2).

We have very few laws against behavior associated with sexual immorality; with some exceptions, such behavior is our constitutional right (i.e., laws allowing immoral behavior conform with interpretations of the Constitution). For example, we have the right to be sexually immoral to a great extent, including behavior associated with fornication, adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, and adult pornography. However, all the deeds of the flesh are considered as sinful by God, who is our judge through Christ.

> **Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality** [fornication]**, impurity, passion** [inordinate affection]**, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience** [*nonbelievers*]**, and in them you** [*brethren*] **also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.** (Colossians 3:5-9)

The fact that these lists of sins repeatedly appear in Paul's letters as warnings to fellow believers demonstrates that we are capable of *all* these sins. If we are honest with ourselves, we have seen one or more of these deeds in ourselves and in our fellow brethren. For example, fornication is likely very common among brethren of all ages, but believers also conduct adulterous and other sexually immoral activities.

Brethren, we are exhorted to stop living according to sin; instead, we are to live according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17). We need to teach the truth of God to our fellow brethren (II Corinthians 6:1-10; 13:7-8; Ephesians 4:14-16)[9] and separate ourselves from fellow brethren who are living overtly sinful lives (I Corinthians 5:9-13), but we need to leave judgment to God. We need to humbly remember how easily any of us can fall into sexual sin and try to help those who are mired in sexual sin (Galatians 6:1-3).

> **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions** [*inordinate* affections] **and desires** [lusts]**. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.** (Galatians 5:22-25)

[9] We cannot change the world for the natural man cannot understand the things, or truth, of God (I Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:5-8). We can only present the gospel of salvation to nonbelievers and then leave it in the hands of God as to who believes it.

Do Not be a Hypocrite

> **Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints** [*fellow believer*s]**, practicing hospitality.** (Romans 12:9-13)

We are to love without hypocrisy, which is to love without dishonesty or deception—our love is to be sincere. Truthfully, all facets of our walk should be without hypocrisy. If we are of the Spirit (because we have been saved by the grace of God) and declare or portray ourselves as such to those around us but are walking according to the flesh (doing any of the things described in this chapter), then we are hypocrites. Brethren, those who know us best know when we are being hypocritical. A hypocrite is a person who feigns beliefs, feelings, or virtues that he does not hold to or possess. He is a pretender, or imposter, and is a deceiver. A hypocrite does not practice what he preaches—he *talks the talk* but does not *walk the walk*. Think about it.

At the time of Jesus' ministry on earth, Israel had long since corrupted the Law of Moses and the religious leaders were in the form of scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. These men had taken over the responsibility of spiritually leading God's people from the Levites who, through the Law of Moses, had been designated by God to do so (Numbers 3:5-9; 8:5-11; 16:8-9; Deuteronomy 10:8-9; 21:5). These spiritual leaders were thoroughly misrepresenting the Law and misleading the people of Israel—all in the name of God. Consequently, Jesus had nothing good to say to them or about them (e.g., Matthew 15:1-9; 16:6, 12; 22:15-18; Luke 12:1; 13:10-17).

> **Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you** [*in accordance with the Law*]**, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them."** (Matthew 23:1-3)

In part of one discourse alone (Matthew 23:13-33), Jesus referred to the scribes and Pharisees of His people as *hypocrites* multiple times. Furthermore, in the same passage, Jesus used the words *blind*, *fools*, *whitewashed tombs*, *serpents*, and *brood of vipers* to describe their character. Consider our *Christian* leaders today. How many are not much different than those men that Jesus was reprimanding? Honestly, how many of us have similar characteristics?

Brethren, are we hypocrites? We need to determine if we are being hypocritical in our thoughts or actions. Please consider the following questions:

- We say that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Romans 13:8-10), but do we treat them as we want to be treated regardless of their color, religion, social standing, political affiliation, etc.?
- We say that we love those who are close to us (I Corinthians 13:4-7), but are we impatient with them, or arrogant or unforgiving toward them?
- We say that we do not break the law and look down upon those who do (Romans 13:1-7; II Corinthians 8:21), but do we intentionally exceed the speed limit, falsify our tax returns, or break other laws that we consider to be inconsequential or a nuisance?
- We say that our fellow brethren are equal in the eyes of God (I Corinthians 12:12-14; Galatians 3:27-28), but do we consider those of the opposite sex, of a different race or culture, or who do not have the same spiritual understanding as we do as inferior?
- We say that God provides for our needs (II Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:11-13, 19), but do we crave more money and possessions than we need?

- We say that God loves a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:6-7; Matthew 6:2-4), but do we give to our church, missionaries, or charities for the purpose of gaining the favor of God or for tax deductions, or give gifts with the expectation of receiving something in return?
- We say that God is in control and that He works all things together for good (Romans 8:28; Philippians 2:12-13), but do we blame God or someone during difficult times, do everything in our power to get our way, or are we quick to sue someone for a real or perceived wrong against us?
- We say that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:18-20), but do we abuse them through unhealthy eating habits, by getting buzzed or drunk, by smoking or vaping, through immoral behavior, by risking injury or life itself through thrill-seeking activities, etc.?
- We say that we are ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20), but do people see us as any different than anyone else because of our attitude, behavior, crude language, etc.?
- We say that we put God first and do not worship idols (I Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:7, 14), but do we put our trust in money, show our adulation for celebrities or other people of prestige or power, or give our allegiance to our flag, nation, or political party?

Hypocrisy is usually driven by pride, which corresponds to a lack of humility. What the Bible says about pride seems to be easily disregarded by us as we think or act in a boastful, arrogant, or superior way to others (Proverbs 16:5, 18; 21:24; Mark 7:20-23; Ephesians 2:8-9). How many other ways do we exhibit our hypocrisy? Do we act one way for some people (e.g., in church) but another way for other people (e.g., family, friends, coworkers, strangers)? How many of us look down upon or judge someone because of something awful he did (e.g., lie, steal, cheat, behave badly, etc.) when we are doing the same things or harboring our own little secrets? It is highly probable that *all* believers are hypocrites in one way or another.

> **"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."** (Matthew 7:1-5)

God's word fully demonstrates that He abhors hypocrisy, and that His people are exhorted to avoid it (Psalm 26:1-4; Matthew 6:1-8, 16; I Timothy 4:1-3; James 3:17). Therefore, we should be careful not to speak or act as hypocrites.

Introspection

Brethren, walking according to the flesh is being disobedient to God. Doing so prevents us from walking worthy of our salvation in Christ and casts a bad light on God and our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to take an honest look at our lives, set aside the deeds of the flesh, and put on—clothe ourselves with—Christ. Among many questions, we should ask ourselves the following:

- Am I no longer conducting myself according to love?
- Have I conformed myself with this world?
- Do I behave as if I was a nonbeliever?
- Do I seek revenge against those who do wrong to me, whether real or perceived?
- Am I resisting or rebelling against those who are in authority over me?
- Do I live as if I were in darkness, according to sin?
- Do I consider myself better than others—am I proud?

- Am I spiritually immature, unable to handle the truth of God?
- Do I ignore, deny, or adulterate the word of God, living according to my own truth?
- Do I lie to others or slander them—am I malicious toward them?
- Am I leading an undisciplined life?
- Do I let or want myself to be controlled by alcohol or other drugs?
- Do I crave more money than I need—am I greedy?
- Am I being sexually immoral in my thoughts or actions?
- In what things am I being a hypocrite?

For what the Law [*of Moses*] **could not do, weak as it was through the flesh** [*our sinful desires*]**, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement** [righteousness] **of the Law might be fulfilled in us** [*believers*]**, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** (Romans 8:3-4)

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly [walk honestly] **as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.** (Romans 13:12-14)

Chapter 14

Obedience to God or to Traditions of Men?

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

For am I [*Paul*] **now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.** (Galatians 1:10)

False Teaching

As noted in the previous chapter, deeds of the flesh through both thoughts and actions present serious impediments to walking worthy of our salvation in Christ. I also suggested that doctrinal error holds us back from conducting our lives as God expects us to do, which is what I want to focus on in this chapter.

I fully recognize that the topics covered in this chapter are dearly held beliefs and Christian traditions by many of my fellow brethren. I grew up embracing most of them and truly believed that I was doing what a Christian should do. Over the years, however, I came to a different understanding. My intention here is not to be condescending or judgmental but to humbly, yet steadfastly, demonstrate what Scripture says about them and what God expects us to believe and do. My hope is that you take all that I have presented up to this point into consideration and prayerfully read these passages and my perspectives on them. Above all, I want to honor God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we obeying God or are we submitting to traditions of men?

Often throughout this book I have commented on specific traditional doctrines and beliefs that are taught in our Christian denominational churches, as well as most of our independent churches, in a negative sense. That is, I believe they are false teaching. I do not say such things lightly—God did not leave it up to us to decide for ourselves what we should believe or not believe. Despite our best intentions, we have a long history of believing and doing what we *think* is right instead of what is right (Proverbs 14:12). Our God is the sovereign Almighty God, and our Lord Jesus Christ died in our place on the cross but was raised up in victory over sin and death. If we believe these two facts of our faith, then we need to believe what God and Christ revealed to us through Scripture regarding our worship and our daily conduct.

Brethren, we tend to disregard God's grace and sovereign will because we do not understand them—we are rarely or inadequately taught them as presented in Scripture. Or worse, we do not want to understand them because they are contrary to our own will and hold us accountable. Because most of us do not recognize the mystery that was revealed to us through Apostle Paul, who received it from our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, we do not know what to obey from the word of God. Even brethren who do recognize the mystery tend to misunderstand, disregard, or disobey God's commands to us. Consequently, Christian doctrine today is a mixture of the Law of Moses, the gospel of the kingdom (which includes obedience to the Law), and the gospel of grace, and we change these doctrines to satisfy ourselves and to fit our preconceived ideas. We are drawn to pastors and teachers who tell us what we want to hear regardless of the truth—they *tickle our ears*, i.e., convey what we want to hear—and we succumb to deceitful teaching (Ephesians 4:14-16). Our words and our actions, unfortunately, demonstrate that we do *not* understand or even really believe Scripture; instead, we treat the word of God essentially as a guide to use, modify, or not use, as we please.

I [*Paul*] **solemnly charge you** [*Timothy*] **in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season**

and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they [*believers*] **will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.** (II Timothy 4:1-4)

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some [*believers*] **will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.** (I Timothy 4:1-3)

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.[1] (I Timothy 6:3-5)

I [*Paul*] **am amazed that you** [*Galatian believers*] **are so quickly deserting Him** [*God*] **who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another** [*i.e., is not good news*]**; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before** [*when we were with you*]**, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received** [*from us*]**, he is to be accursed!** (Galatians 1:6-9)

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Galatian brethren were convinced by false teachers to put themselves back under the Law of Moses. They were motivated by trying to do works of righteousness instead of relying by faith on the righteous work of Christ at the cross. Their efforts of self-righteousness led to conducting their lives according to the deeds of the flesh instead of walking by the Holy Spirit. In so many ways today, Christianity is trying to draw its guidance and motivation from the Law of Moses, or at least parts of it, and changing it to fit preconceived ideas. We are relying on the traditions of men instead of obeying God.

When God gave His law to His people of Israel, He explicitly commanded through His prophet Moses that it was to be obeyed to the letter and not changed in any way (Deuteronomy 1:3; 4:1-2). During Jesus' ministry to His people, He said that He came to fulfill the Law of Moses and that nothing was to be added or subtracted from it until everything in it was fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18). Even after His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to continue to obey the Law of Moses and to teach it to His people and the nations because many of the prophecies in the Law have not yet been fulfilled (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:44-47; see also Matthew 23:1-3).[2]

Israel, however, did not obey God and His command to obey His law and ended up killing His prophets and His Son—their promised Messiah. Furthermore, they rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit through Christ's twelve apostles and other men of God, eventually killing Stephen who was speaking under the influence of

[1] The KJV ends verse 5 with "from such withdraw thyself" that is consistent with II Timothy 2:14-19 and II Timothy 3:1-5 but may have been added to this verse by the KJV translators or editors.

[2] I encourage you to read my study **The Law of Moses** that addresses the Scripture references that support these statements.

the Holy Spirit. Israel, therefore, effectively rejected God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit and was due to be judged in accordance with prophecy. But their prophetic judgment did not happen, nor the judgment of the nations, nor the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. Why?

Brethren, as shown in Chapter 4, we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under the administration, or dispensation, of God's grace. The Law of Moses was the law of God given to the nation of Israel after He led the people out of their bondage in Egypt through His servant and prophet Moses. Because the Law was perfect, however, it condemned not only the people of Israel but everyone in sin (Romans 3:19-20; 7:7-11; 8:1-4; II Corinthians 3:5-6; Galatians 3:10-14). Thankfully, because of the righteous work accomplished by Christ at the cross, the jurisdiction and condemnation of the Law was taken out of our way when it was figuratively nailed to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:13-14). We know this because God, through revelations of Jesus Christ to His chosen Apostle Paul, revealed His mystery and ushered in the dispensation of His grace (Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-12).

Traditions of Men

We are instructed to accurately handle, or rightly divide, the word of truth—God's word. I remember singing the hymn "Every Promise in the Book is Mine" in church. This sentiment sounds good, but it is not true. There are numerous promises, including promises of judgment, throughout the Bible that only apply to specific persons or specific nations, particularly the nation of Israel. We need to distinguish, through the context in which they are written, which promises of God apply to whom. If we try to apply promises or commands to ourselves that do not apply in this dispensation of grace, our tendency is to change them to force-fit them to our own desires. When we do so, we are no longer obeying the word of God; instead, we are conforming to the traditions of men.

> **Be diligent** [*endeavor*] **to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)

I have already described or touched on such teachings as observing the sabbath, Christian holidays, church membership, and a host of other subjects that may or may not be mentioned in the Bible but are falsely considered to be tenets of our faith. The following *doctrines* are some of the traditions of men, based on truths taken out of context or deceptively modified from the word of God as well as falsehoods added to Scripture, that are being taught in our churches today. All are roadblocks to a worthy walk as members of the body of Christ. Because of their prominence and acceptance in Christian teaching today, I believe that it is important that the subjects be explained in enough detail to answer questions or objections that may come to mind. My hope is that you will search the word of God for yourself.

The Ten Commandments

A popular topic among believers, and those who falsely profess to be Christians, is the perceived need to publicly display the Ten Commandments. I grew up being taught, and I believed, that we should obey the Ten Commandments. I do not recall, however, being taught the consequences for breaking the commandments except that God demands the death penalty for murder. I have addressed the Ten Commandments, and the fact that they do not apply in this dispensation of God's grace, in Chapters 4 and 12. Please bear with me, though, as I provide a brief summary in the context of this chapter.

The Ten Commandments are part of the Law of Moses—they cannot be separated from the rest of the Law. If we are to obey the Law, then we must obey it to the letter and administer the consequences of breaking the Law. The direct consequence of breaking four of the commandments was being put to death. Blood

sacrifices and sometimes restitution were required for breaking other commandments. As sinful beings, even as believers, why would we want to try to live according to the Ten Commandments?

Brethren, the Ten Commandments are not merely a set of guiding principles that we can choose, or not choose, to follow; we cannot obey them and we are not even supposed to try to do so. Why, then, do we want to impose it on the nonbelieving world in which we live? Posting the Ten Commandments will never draw anyone to God or to the need for salvation, and some people may be deceived or even demoralized by believing they need to obey them to appease God.

Teaching that we must obey the Ten Commandments is not only a tradition of men but is disobedient to God. Furthermore, doing so is proof that we do not understand what Christ accomplished for us at the cross. Are we saved by works of righteousness or by the grace of God by believing the gospel of salvation (Romans 4:4-5; 6:14; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Titus 3:4-7)?

> **For by grace you** [*believers*] **have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Great Commission

I was taught in the Baptist and evangelical churches in which I was a member that we are to obey and help fulfill the so-called *great commission*. I say so-called, because the verses that are used to support that teaching do not refer to a *great commission*—it is called as such through tradition. I truly believed that I should obey *the great commission* and actively participated in the nationwide evangelical "I Found It" campaign in my hometown in the 1970s. The passage that is most commonly used to describe *the great commission* occurs at the end of the book of Matthew.

> **"Go therefore and make disciples of** [teach] **all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matthew 28:19-20)

This passage presents part of the last commandments of Jesus to His eleven disciples prior to ascending into heaven (Matthew 28:16-18; Mark 16:14). Therefore, Christianity has concluded to treat it as our *marching orders* to spread *the gospel* and prepare the earth for the promised kingdom with Christ as King. However, the command in Matthew is further described for us in the following equivalent passages in Mark, Luke, John, and Acts, but these are less well known because they are rarely taught. It would be helpful to also read the associated verses of these passages to gain an understanding of the context.

> **And He** [*Jesus*] **said to them** [*the eleven disciples*]**, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel** [*of the kingdom*] **to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved** [*does not believe*] **shall be condemned. These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."** (Mark 16:15-18)

> **Now He** [*Jesus*] **said to them** [*the disciples*]**, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the**

promise of My Father [*the Holy Spirit—John 14:26*] **upon you; but you are to stay in the city** [of Jerusalem] **until you are clothed with power from on high."** (Luke 24:44-49)

So Jesus said to them [*the disciples*] **again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained** [*remain unforgiven*]**."** (John 20:21-23)

So when they [*the eleven apostles*] **had come together, they were asking Him** [*Jesus*]**, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."** (Acts 1:6-8)

Please think about these passages. If we are to obey Jesus' parting commands to His disciples, then we must do the following:

- Make disciples of all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem, then Judea, and then Samaria, before going to the other nations (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).
- Preach the gospel of Israel's promised kingdom (Mark 16:15; Acts 1:6; see also Matthew 10:7), which included repentance for forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; see also Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; Mark 1:4).
- Baptize those who believe the gospel and repent of their sins (Matthew 28:19). Repentance and water baptism were required for salvation (Mark 16:16; see also Acts 2:37-38).
- Teach all who are saved to obey all the commands given by Jesus during His ministry (Matthew 28:20). This included obeying the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-20; 23:1-3; see also Acts 21:20; I John 3:21-24; 5:2-3), not taking any food, money, or extra clothing during their ministry (Matthew 10:9-10; Mark 6:7-9), and selling all their possessions (Matthew 19:21; Luke 14:33; see also Acts 2:44-45).
- Forgive (remit) the sins of those who believe, and do not forgive (retain) the sins of those who do not do so (John 20:23).
- Perform miraculous signs and wonders, including healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, and speaking in new tongues after receiving the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:17-18; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; see also Matthew 10:8; Acts 2:1-11, 43; 6:8; 8:5-7).

Although some claim to be obeying certain parts of *the great commission*, they are doing so falsely, whether intentionally or more likely through misunderstanding of the truth. No one is actually obeying the requirements of *the great commission*. Brethren, God does not expect us to do so, because these commands do not apply to us in this dispensation of grace.

Nowhere in Paul's letters did he ever tell the brethren to go out and make disciples. We are not followers of Israel's kingdom message, nor are we to follow Christ as the disciples followed—literally followed—Jesus during His ministry. Paul never referred to believers in this dispensation of grace as disciples because we are *in* Christ and He is *in* us—we are members of His body. As presented in Chapter 8, we are to follow (imitate) Paul as he followed Christ.

I examined *gospels* at length in Chapter 4 to demonstrate the dispensational differences of the various gospels mentioned in the Bible. The gospel that Jesus commanded His disciples to preach was the gospel of the kingdom, referring to the good news of the imminence of Israel's long-promised kingdom. For the kingdom

to be established, however, Israel needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Paul never spoke of that kingdom being our promise, and repentance and baptism are not required for our salvation. I will address baptism in the next section.

As also explained in Chapter 4, there was a specific reason for the apostles to begin their ministry in Jerusalem before going to the remainder of Judea, then Samaria, and then the Gentile nations. This progression was part of God's prophetic plan—Israel needed to be redeemed before the Gentile nations could be blessed by God. However, Jerusalem did not turn to God, nor did Judea (its capital was Jerusalem), nor Samaria that comprised the remainder of historical Israel. In the last references to the apostles and Jewish elders in the book of Acts, they were still in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 15:1-29; 21:15-18; see also Galatians 2:1-10). God, according to His eternal plan, chose Paul to reveal His message of grace to the Gentiles.

As members of the body of Christ, we do not have the authority or power to remit or retain the sins of others. We are to forgive those who sin against us (Ephesians 4:32), but that does not mean that we can forgive their sins as the disciples were commanded to do. Although it is God who forgives sins through Christ, the disciples would know, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who was believing the gospel of the kingdom and was truly repentant and who was not (Matthew 10:11-15). This was the gift of knowledge that Peter displayed regarding the false believers Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

Contrary to beliefs held by some, we do not have the promise, authority, or power to perform *any* of the miraculous signs listed in Jesus' command to His disciples (Mark 16:17-18). Nor can we raise the dead (Matthew 10:8). I will explain this later under the heading **Sign Gifts**.

Now, every believer is an ambassador for Christ—we are His representatives in the nonbelieving world. God has committed to us the word of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-19). That is, we are to share the gospel of God's grace, which encompasses the work of Christ at the cross for us and includes the gospel of our salvation—that He died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up again.

In God's prophetic plan, the kingdom believers will be perfect—sinless (Ezekiel 36:22-28; Hebrews 8:12; I John 3:4-10). They will not need to be told what to do in obedience to God because they will automatically know it (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:11). We, on the other hand, will continue to sin until we die or are caught up to be with our Lord in the heavens. Consequently, we are exhorted how to walk worthy of our salvation in Christ despite our sinfulness. These are important differences that God wants us to believe, understand, and obey.

It is not up to us to prepare the world for Christ's physical and triumphant return as King of kings and Lord of lords. God will accomplish that work through Israel *after* He has redeemed that nation, which will be *after* the close of this dispensation of grace culminated by the rapture. I address as-yet unfulfilled prophecies that we will not endure, which include God's judgments that are beyond our comprehension, in my study about the mystery in Appendix C.

Our efforts to obey *the great commission*, therefore, are in accordance with the traditions of men instead of in obedience to God. Through Paul, however, we have all the tools necessary to know how to conduct our lives (walk worthy) as good ambassadors for Christ in accordance with our salvation in Him.

Water Baptism

As noted above, Jesus commanded the disciples to perform water baptism as they spread the gospel of the kingdom. Probably because of that command, nearly all denominations that consider themselves to be *Christian*, along with numerous independent churches, incorporate water baptism into their tenants of faith.

Depending on the denomination or church, water baptism may be required for remission of sins, to be saved, to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and/or for church membership. Or it may be required or at least strongly recommended to follow Jesus in baptism and as a testimony to the world. Also, there are different but strongly held positions regarding the method of baptism, when a person should be baptized, and what words should be spoken as a person is baptized.

When I was an infant, I was baptized in the church that my parents attended, but I never asked about the method or the purpose of it. I was also baptized by immersion in a Conservative Baptist church when I was fourteen. As I recall, it was done in obedience to God, to follow Jesus in baptism, to be a witness to the world, and to become a member of that church.

Many of our churches consider water baptism to be an ordinance—a required observance or command—to be obeyed. Because of its significance in church doctrine, therefore, I consider it necessary to address this subject comprehensively. Also, I will readdress some of the things I have already covered, but with the context of baptism in mind. As you read this perspective, please ask yourself, "Should we be baptized?"

> **There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you** [*believers*] **were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in** [you] **all.** (Ephesians 4:4-6)

There are different baptisms in the Bible, but Paul referred to one baptism. What did he mean by that? If there is only one, then which one is it? Before answering these questions, let us look at the various baptisms revealed in Scripture.

Baptisms in the Bible

The word *baptism* and its variants, including *baptisms* and *baptize,* only occur in the New Testament. They are translated from the Greek words *baptismŏs*, *baptisma*, and *baptizō*, meaning literal or symbolic washings or cleansings, or an identification with someone or something. The equivalent Hebrew word in the Old Testament for a ceremonial washing or bathing is *râchats*. These words are used in the following ways in Scripture:

- The priests of Israel were required under the Law of Moses to be ceremonially washed (Exodus 29:1-4; 30:17-21; 40:12)
- A man afflicted with leprosy was cured by washing seven times in the Jordan River (II Kings 5:1-14).
- The people of Israel were baptized into Moses (I Corinthians 10:1-4).
- Various washings were included in the old covenant—the Law of Moses (Hebrews 9:8-10).
- Repentance and water baptism was required for the remission of sins (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3-6; Acts 2:38).
- Christ referred to His future crucifixion as a baptism to be baptized with (Matthew 20:22-23—KJV).
- The Pharisees conducted ceremonial washings of hands, cups, pitchers, and pots (Mark 7:3-4).
- John the Baptist said that Christ would baptize His disciples with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11).
- The Hebrew brethren were exhorted to move on to spiritual maturity, beyond the doctrine of baptisms (Hebrews 6:1-3—KJV).
- Upon believing the gospel of salvation we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27).
- Those who are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3-4).
- We are buried with Christ in baptism (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4).

- There is one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- A saving baptism is related to, or associated with, the resurrection of Christ (I Peter 3:21).

Some of these baptisms involved water. They were ceremonial or representative *washings* that signified a purification or cleansing of someone or something. Jesus referred to His pending crucifixion as a baptism, which did not involve water. Some of the references use baptism to describe our identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, and represent an act of God associated with our salvation without the use of water. One reference represents the people of Israel's relationship with Moses as a baptism, which was a spiritual identification that did not involve water. Another reference signifies how believers received, through a miraculous baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit that gave them the ability to perform miracles, speak in tongues, prophesy, and know the will of God. Finally, one reference tells us there is one baptism. What is that baptism, when Scripture describes more than one baptism? These various baptisms will be addressed in this section.

Scriptural Origin of Water Baptism

Baptism, in a physical sense, means to wash or bathe, signifying a cleansing or purification. When John the Baptist started baptizing the people of Judea, the act of baptism was not a surprise or something new to the people (John 1:19-27). Baptism was an Old Testament ordinance—it was part of the Law of Moses.

- Israel was to become a nation of priests (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 61:6). The first ceremony for the anointing of a priest was to be *washed* (Exodus 29:1-4). This symbolic washing made the priest holy before the Lord God, so that he would not die when entering the tabernacle (Exodus 30:17-21).
- Sprinkling water, using a branch of hyssop, ceremonially cleansed or purified an unclean person (Numbers 19:14-19; Psalm 51:5-9).

Israel was not obedient to God and did not become a nation of priests. However, after the close of this dispensation of grace, Israel will repent, be redeemed, and become a nation of priests (I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). This will occur as an integral part of Israel's long-promised kingdom (I Chronicles 17:9-14; Psalm 89:3-4, 34-37; II Samuel 7:12-16; Acts 1:6; 3:18-26). When God redeems Israel, He will *sprinkle clean water* on them (perhaps figuratively, but a baptism nevertheless) to purify them (Ezekiel 36:22-28). God's prophetic plan for Israel is described in Appendix C and my study **The Law of Moses**.

Long before Jesus' ministry to His people, the scribes and Pharisees had usurped the God-given responsibility of administering the Law of Moses from the Levites (Matthew 23:1-3). The ceremonial washing (*baptismŏs*) of hands, cups, pitchers, and pots by the Pharisees was one of the many traditions that the spiritual leaders *added* to the Law of Moses—it was a tradition of men that invalidated the word of God (Mark 7:1-13).

> **And He** [*Jesus*] **said to them** [*Pharisees and scribes*]**, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts** [commandments] **of men.' Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."** (Mark 7:6-8)

The Baptism Proclaimed by John the Baptist

John the Baptist's birth, Jesus' birth, and John's ministry were the beginning of fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel's promised kingdom with Messiah as King. John's ministry to make ready the way of the Lord was prophesied (Matthew 3:1-3; 11:9-11; Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1). Furthermore,

John came baptizing with water so that Jesus would be manifested (made known or revealed) to Israel as the Lamb of God and the Son of God (John 1:29-34; Isaiah 53:7).

Additionally, John the Baptist's ministry was in fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah, which is true because he was John, born of Zacharias and Elizabeth (John 1:21-25; Luke 1:5-17). However, Jesus said that John the Baptist was the prophet Elijah who was to come and prepare the way for the Messiah (Matthew 11:7-15; 17:9-13; Mark 1:2-4; Malachi 3:1). The prophecy about Elijah, therefore, was referring to John the Baptist instead of the man Elijah—John the Baptist was a prophet like Elijah. This is similar to the prophecy regarding David sitting on the throne in the kingdom, which was actually referring to Christ and not to the man David (Ezekiel 37:24; Acts 2:22-36).

John the Baptist, Jesus (while He was on earth), and His disciples all proclaimed that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matthew 3:1-3; 4:17; 10:5-7). In accordance with prophecy, Israel had to repent and be cleansed from unrighteousness before God could establish their promised kingdom. John used the Old Testament practice (as required by the Law of Moses) of water baptism as the symbol for cleansing from sin and uncleanness. That someone came baptizing the people of Judea was expected; what the people did not understand, however, was that John was the man spoken of by the prophets (John 1:25).

Water baptism was an integral part of the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 28:19-20; John 3:22; 4:1-2). The baptism of John was for repentance and forgiveness of sins, so it was a requirement for salvation (Mark 16:16). Therefore, this baptism was an ordinance of God.

> **Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Matthew 3:1-2)

> **Then Jerusalem was going out to him** [*John the Baptist*]**, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan river, as they confessed their sins.** (Matthew 3:5-6)

> **John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a** [the] **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** (Mark 1:4)

At Pentecost, after Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, the baptism of John was still required for salvation (Acts 2:38). Although some teach that water baptism should follow repentance for the remission of sins, this is not what Peter proclaimed to the people at Pentecost. Additionally, some teach that water baptism should be accompanied by the words "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" to be valid (Matthew 28:19). However, Peter did not use these exact words at Pentecost, so the Matthew 28:19 reference did not prescribe the words to be said during a baptism but signified that the apostles were to baptize in the name of, or by the authority of, the Godhead. As John's ministry was making the way for Israel's Messiah, his baptisms from the beginning were by the authority of God (Matthew 3:11-12; John 1:19-34). Water baptism, therefore, had not changed since it was instituted by John the Baptist.

> **Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness** [remission] **of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38)

Furthermore, the baptism of John continued to be practiced as long as the gospel of the kingdom was preached to Israel. In his ministry of preaching the things concerning Jesus to the Jews in Ephesus, Apollos was still incorporating the baptism of John quite some time after Pentecost (Acts 18:24-26). Even later, the believing Jews in Jerusalem were still zealous for the Law of Moses, so they would have been implementing

the baptism of John, also (Acts 21:17-20). Is water baptism for repentance and remission of sins still required today in this dispensation of grace?

Why was Christ Baptized?

As we have seen, John came baptizing with water so that Christ would be revealed to His people (Israel) as the Son of God and as the one who would take away their sins (as the Lamb of God—John 1:29-36). When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove onto Jesus (which John saw), at which time God the Father, through some type of voice from heaven, declared Him to be His Son (Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:32-34). Although those present at Jesus' baptism may have heard some type of sound (as they did on another occasion—John 12:27-29), Scripture does not say that anyone heard the words of God other than Jesus Himself. This is understandable because no person has heard His voice (John 5:37).

John's baptism was of repentance for the remission of sins, so why would Jesus, who was sinless, need to be baptized (II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:21-22)? Jesus told John that His baptism was necessary to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). How did it fulfill all righteousness?

- Israel was to be a nation of priests, and Christ would be their High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15). Because the Law of Moses required the priests to be ceremonially washed with water, Jesus' baptism was in accordance with the Law.
- According to prophecy, Jesus was to be numbered with the transgressors; that is, identified with sinners (Isaiah 53:12). Because the people who came to John to be baptized did so for repentance and remission of sins, Jesus identified Himself with the sinners by being baptized.

Although Isaiah 53:12 was specifically referring to the death of Christ for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53:4-6), Jesus' baptism was the first step in identifying Himself with sinners. His crucifixion as a criminal with other criminals completed that identification with sinners (Luke 22:37). Jesus referred to His pending crucifixion as a baptism that He was to be baptized with (Matthew 20:22-23—KJV); He fully identified with mankind by taking on all our sin and paying the price for that sin (II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 6:8-11; Philippians 2:5-8). Therefore, the water baptism of Jesus was the initial step in fulfilling all righteousness.

Many of us who have been water baptized did so, at least in part, to follow Jesus in baptism. That was one of the reasons why I was baptized. Consider again why Jesus was baptized: to be made manifest to Israel, to be counted with sinners, to meet the requirements for a high priest, and to fulfill all righteousness. No baptism today accomplishes any of those things. Brethren, how can we possibly follow Jesus in baptism? We cannot do so.

Water Baptism and Miraculous Signs

Every specific example of water baptism in the Bible is preceded, accompanied, or followed (though not always immediately) by something miraculous. As part of *the great commission* to His disciples, Jesus said that miraculous signs would accompany those who believed the gospel of the kingdom and were baptized (Mark 16:15-18). The specific examples of water baptism and associated miracles are described as follows:

- Matthew 3:13-17—Immediately after Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and the voice of God declared Jesus to be His Son.
- Acts 2:38, 43—During Pentecost, those who repented and were baptized for the remission of sins received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and many signs and wonders took place through the apostles.
- Acts 8:9-13—After Simon was baptized by Philip, he observed signs and great miracles.

- Acts 8:34-40—After the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized by Philip, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, miraculously transporting him to another city.
- Acts 9:1-19—Saul (Paul) was miraculously blinded by a light from heaven and then spoken to by the resurrected Jesus Christ. Later he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and his sight was restored when Ananias laid his hands on him; Ananias then baptized him.
- Acts 10:30-48—When the Roman centurion Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him believed Peter's message about Christ, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues and exalting God; then they were baptized.
- Acts 16:13-18—Not long after Paul baptized Lydia and her household, he cast a spirit of divination (a demon) out of a girl.
- Acts 16:25-34—A miraculous earthquake opened the cell doors and unfastened the prisoners' chains in the prison holding Paul and Silas. The jailer and his household believed the message of Paul regarding the Lord Jesus and were baptized.

Although miracles occurred before or after, in the last two specific instances of water baptism there is no mention of Lydia, the jailer, or their families being filled with the Holy Spirit, anyone speaking in tongues, or a demonstration of other signs and wonders at the time of the baptisms. This omission *may* be significant. As explained later, the purpose of water baptism changed during the Acts period, so it is likely that the association of miracles with baptism also changed. Did a miracle obvious to those around you accompany your baptism? No miracles occurred before, during, or after my baptism.

The Purpose of Baptism Changed

Paul's background as an important Jewish Pharisee known as Saul of Tarsus is covered in Chapter 8. Saul had been given authority by the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem to gather up followers of Jesus in Damascus for imprisonment (Acts 9:1-2, 13-14). While on his way to Damascus to find and detain believers, Saul was miraculously blinded and spoken to by the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ who saved him for the purpose of appointing him to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-16; 22:1-16; Romans 11:13). After Saul believed what Christ and Ananias told him, he regained his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was then baptized with water (Acts 9:17-18).

This is the first example where being filled with, or baptized with, the Holy Spirit (as demonstrated when Saul regained his sight) occurred *before* water baptism instead of after. Furthermore, it is interesting that there is no record in Scripture that Saul repented of his sins as part of his baptism, even though he sinned directly against Christ. However, in his case water baptism was still a symbolic washing away of sins as it always had been (Acts 22:16).

Sometime after Saul's salvation and baptism, Peter received a vision from the Holy Spirit to meet with the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:9-23). The significance of this was immense because Peter knew from Jesus' last commands that the disciples were not to go to the Gentiles until Israel had repented, which it had not done (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:6-8; 10:28-29). As with Saul, Cornelius and his men were baptized by Peter *after* they received the gift of the Holy Spirit and were speaking in tongues and exalting God (Acts 10:44-48). This was a new experience for Peter, and he recognized that God had granted the repentance that leads to life to the Gentiles (remember, this occurred after Paul, the chosen apostle of the Gentiles, was saved), but there is no record of Cornelius or the others confessing their sins (Acts 11:15-18).

Scripture does not say that Cornelius repented of his sins, but that repentance was *granted* to the Gentiles, referring to salvation from the penalty of sin (Acts 5:30-31). God required repentance from the people of Israel because of their disobedience to God and for killing their Messiah, whereas the Gentiles had always been

separated from God and did not have a promised Messiah. Peter recalled this experience later when he defended Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles before a council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6-11).

Therefore, beginning with Saul's baptism, the purpose of water baptism had changed. Instead of a requirement to be saved and to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, it now was conducted *after* a person was saved and *after* a miraculous demonstration of the Holy Spirit. However, it continued to represent the washing away of sins as it had since instituted in the Law of Moses. Is that the purpose of water baptism today in this dispensation of grace?

Baptisms Performed by Paul

Paul performed water baptisms as recorded in Acts and in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul spoke with Lydia, a Jewish merchant who was a worshipper of God. When she and those with her believed what he told them, Paul baptized them (Acts 16:13-15). As he had done at Antioch, Paul most likely proved from Scripture that Jesus was the Son of God and the Holy One—Israel's Savior—and then told them of the grace of God (Acts 13:14-39). It is probably significant that there is no mention of a need for repentance, which is understandable because Paul did not preach the gospel of the kingdom. However, their baptism would have represented the washing away of sins. As previously noted, there is no record in Scripture that Lydia and her household received the gift of the Holy Spirit before or after their baptism.

After Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a slave girl in the Roman city of Philippi, he and Silas were beaten and put in prison (Acts 16:16-24). Despite their beatings and imprisonment, Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God. A miraculous earthquake caused the prison doors to open and the chains that bound them to become unfastened. Instead of escaping the prison as might be expected, they reassured the jailer that they were still in their cells. By the grace of God, the jailer recognized that a miracle had occurred (he probably overheard their prayers and singing) and asked what to do to be saved. Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord with the jailer and those in his house, then he and all who believed in the Lord Jesus were baptized (Acts 16:25-34). As with Lydia, there is no mention of repentance, which would not have been appropriate because the jailer likely was not a Jew. Nor is there any mention of these new believers receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul went to Corinth, he went to the Jewish synagogue first (as was his custom—Acts 17:1-3) to reason with the Jews and show them from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Son of God and the Christ—Israel's Messiah. As occurred elsewhere during his ministry, most of the Jews resisted his teaching and blasphemed God. However, Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and some others did believe what they heard and were baptized (Acts 18:1-8; I Corinthians 1:12-16). Again, there is no mention of repentance being involved or receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (some Corinthian brethren, however, exercised the gift of tongues).

In the account in Acts 19:1-7, we learn that twelve (or so) Ephesian disciples (believing Jews) had been baptized with the baptism of John. However, they had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit after their baptism and did not even know there was a Holy Spirit. Paul reminded them of the baptism of John, who told the people to believe in Jesus. Although Acts 19:5 is usually interpreted as saying that Paul rebaptized the Ephesian disciples, that verse is actually referring to the people who had heard the message of John as being

baptized at that time.[3] Why would Paul baptize these disciples in the name of Jesus again? If he had, this would be the first and only reference in the Bible regarding rebaptism. For example, none of the believers in the upper room at Pentecost were rebaptized, nor were the brethren referred to in Acts 8:12-17 rebaptized by Peter and John. Instead, because Paul knew what these Ephesian disciples had heard and why they had been baptized, the disciples could recognize Paul's authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ for knowing such things. Paul consequently laid hands on them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Why Did Paul Baptize?

We have seen that the purpose of water baptism began to change with Paul's baptism. So, why did Paul baptize some people? We must remember that Paul did not preach the gospel of the kingdom, which required baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Contrary to what Peter and the other disciples preached (Matthew 10:7; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:36-39; 3:18-26), Paul never told the Jews in the cities to which he traveled that their promised kingdom was at hand and that they needed to repent to receive it. When Paul spoke at the Jewish synagogues, he first reasoned with them that Jesus was the Son of God and their prophesied Messiah (*the Christ*), and that the people of Jerusalem demanded His crucifixion but that He subsequently was raised from the dead—all in accordance with prophetic Scriptures (Acts 13:23-37). Additionally, he revealed to them how we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under grace, which was entirely new and different than what Peter and the other disciples preached (Acts 13:38-39; 20:24). As noted earlier, most of the Jews rejected Paul's message.

John the Baptist and the eleven disciples (later twelve with the addition of Mathias) were sent to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to baptize with water (John 1:31-33; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Paul, on the other hand, specifically said that *he was not sent to baptize* (I Corinthians 1:17). If this was the case, why did Paul baptize some people anyway? Although there is no recorded instance where Paul told people to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins, his baptisms still represented the ceremonial washing away of sins because that is what he understood from his own baptism (Acts 22:16).[4] Furthermore, as with demonstrating the signs and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit, conducting water baptism was a proof to the Jews of Paul's apostleship.

Did Paul Stop Baptizing?

The risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ began revealing His message to Paul at his conversion on the road to Damascus and immediately afterward through Ananias. Initially, Paul found out that he was being sent to the Gentiles and that he was to suffer for the sake of Christ (Acts 9:3-6, 15-16). This was only the first of many revelations to Paul from Christ (Galatians 1:11-17; Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 11:23-26; II Corinthians 12:1-7; Ephesians 3:1-3). Paul's message, consisting of the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God, was centered on God's eternal purpose regarding the complete work of Christ at the cross (Ephesians 3:1-12; Colossians 1:25-27). During the course of these revelations, Christ gradually revealed His full message to Paul.[5] A careful review of the book of Acts and Paul's letters will demonstrate that the baptism of

[3] Acts 19:5 does not say that Paul baptized them; instead, it says that they were baptized. The original Greek manuscripts did not include punctuation, so translators added it where deemed appropriate. Some Bible versions have closed quotes after Acts 19:4, but they probably should be after verse 5.

[4] The forgiveness of our sins in this dispensation of grace is considered by God to be a washing, or cleansing; however, no water baptism is involved (I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4-7; Ephesians 5:25-27).

[5] This gradual revelation is sometimes referred to as *progressive revelation*, just as Moses did not receive the entire Law all at once, and the prophecies concerning Israel and the last days were not revealed all at once.

repentance for the remission of sins was never part of Christ's revelations to Paul. In fact, Paul said that he was not sent to baptize.

Paul did baptize some believers, however. As will be explained later, the sign gifts through the power of the Holy Spirit passed away—they were part of Paul's early ministry but were absent in the latter part of his ministry. As with baptism, they were proof of Paul's apostleship to the Jews. The Jews of Jerusalem and Judea had already rejected the ministry of Peter and the disciples, with the stoning of Stephen being the defining point of their rejection (Acts 7:51 – 8:1). After his salvation, Paul spoke to the Jews in their synagogues in the Gentile cities. He had a deep love for his kinsmen (fellow Jews) and desired that they be saved (Romans 9:1-5) but realized that they may not have heard of Jesus or His crucifixion. So, he explained who Christ was and that the Law and the Prophets had spoken of Him. As with the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, however, their general reaction was rejection of the truth (Acts 13:44-47; 18:5-6; 28:23-28).

As we have seen, water baptism and miraculous signs went hand-in-hand. They were integral components of God's message to the nation of Israel. With God's setting aside of Israel during this dispensation of grace, the need for, and role of, water baptism and miraculous signs ended. Therefore, not only did Paul lose the power to perform signs and wonders, as demonstrated by his inability to heal his coworkers, he stopped performing water baptism. Outside of his first letter to the Corinthians, which was written during the early part of his ministry, Paul did not mention water baptism or miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in his letters. However, Paul did write about another baptism—a spiritual baptism—that was previously unknown.

One Baptism

> **There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you** [*believers*] **were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in** [you] **all.** (Ephesians 4:4-6)

In his letter to the Ephesian believers, which was written while in a Roman prison prior to his execution (Ephesians 3:1; II Timothy 4:6-8), Paul spoke of one baptism. What is that one baptism?

Remember that Paul said that Israel was baptized into Moses when they were in the wilderness after escaping Egypt (I Corinthians 10:1-4). That was not a physical baptism; instead, it described the nation's identification with Moses who was God's servant and prophet. The one baptism Paul mentioned in his letter to the Ephesians also is a spiritual baptism; however, this one identifies all believers with Christ.

Remember, also, that John the Baptist foretold that *Christ would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit*—a baptism of power that would enable them to perform miracles (Matthew 3:11). Please note that *the baptizer is Christ*. This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, and it occurred *after* they had repented and had been water baptized for the remission of sins. Is this the same spiritual baptism we receive? Please consider the following passages.

> **For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we** [*believers*] **were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks** [Gentiles]**, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of** [*partake of, be satisfied by*] **one Spirit.** (I Corinthians 12:12-13)

> **Now you** [*brethren*] **are Christ's body, and individually members of it.** (I Corinthians 12:27)

> **For all of you who were baptized into Christ** [*by the Spirit*] **have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek** [*Gentile*]**, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:27-28)

Believers in this dispensation of grace are *baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ*, which is completely different than the baptism foretold by John and as demonstrated at Pentecost. Now, *the baptizer is the Holy Spirit*, and through this work of the Holy Spirit each believer is automatically made a member of the body of Christ. What did Paul mean by being baptized into Christ? When does this occur?

Just as Israel was identified with Moses, we are completely identified with Christ. Our spiritual baptism identifies us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection: His death is our death, His burial is our burial, and His resurrection is our resurrection. Furthermore, this baptism is completely performed by God through His Holy Spirit—there is no action on our part nor is any water involved.

> **Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus** [*by the Spirit*] **have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with** [destroyed]**, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed** [*acquitted*] **from sin.** (Romans 6:3-7)

> **For in Him** [*Christ*] **all the fullness of Deity** [Godhead] **dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in** [the faith of] **the working** [operation] **of God, who raised Him from the dead.** (Colossians 2:9-12)

When does our baptism into Christ occur? At the very moment we believe the gospel of salvation, we are permanently sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our baptism into Christ occurs at the moment of our salvation; in fact, this work of the Holy Spirit enables us to believe the gospel of salvation (II Thessalonians 2:13). There is no waiting for it, and no person can bestow it upon us.

> **In Him** [*Christ*]**, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

As demonstrated earlier, the word baptism means *to wash*. By believing the gospel of salvation, we are forgiven all our sins—past, present, and future (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11; Ephesians 1:7; I Thessalonians 5:23-24; Hebrews 10:11-14). In that sense our sins are washed away (I Corinthians 6:11), so our spiritual baptism into Christ is considered by God to be a washing of regeneration—we have been made a new creature, or creation (II Corinthians 5:17).

> **But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the** [*sure*] **hope of eternal life.** (Titus 3:4-7)

Unfortunately, denominational doctrine has instituted water baptism to represent our death, burial, and resurrection in Christ. Brethren, never was water baptism in the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) or the book of Acts ever said to represent Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It was a physical

baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and not a spiritual baptism into Christ. Our spiritual baptism into Christ, as revealed in the above passages, does not include any water or the actions of man—it is an operation of God through His Holy Spirit. If God had wanted us to symbolize our complete identification with Christ through the act of water baptism, He would have told us to do so, and Ephesians 4:5 would have said *two baptisms* instead of *one baptism*.

Water Baptism and Circumcision

As stated earlier, Christian denominations consider water baptism to be an ordinance of God—they believe that it is something we must do to be obedient to God. Even when Paul was baptizing people, however, he told the Corinthian believers that he was thankful that he had baptized only a few of them (I Corinthians 1:10-17). Also, there is no mention of any of Paul's coworkers baptizing anyone or being instructed to do so. The Corinthians were prone to boasting, which included boasting in their baptism. Although Paul's letters do not specifically tell us not to baptize with water, they do tell us there is one baptism, which is the same as saying that we should not be conducting water baptism in this dispensation of grace.

Water baptism was an ordinance of God until Israel was set aside by God. There was another ordinance of God that the Galatian brethren were convinced that they needed to obey but that is contrary to the will of God in this dispensation of grace: circumcision. This example is presented here because the Galatian brethren thought of circumcision in a similar way that Christians today think of water baptism.

Paul had ministered to and established the Galatian brethren (apparently in the cities and region of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) during three separate trips. He taught them the gospel of grace and fully explained to them that they (and all brethren in Christ) were no longer under the Law of Moses but under the grace of God. He told them that they were free from the yoke of bondage that the people of Israel had been under in trying to keep the Law (Galatians 3:10-14; 5:1; see also Acts 15:1-11). However, sometime after his third trip to them, false brethren (imposters) had convinced them that they needed to return to the requirements of the Law of Moses to be obedient to God (Galatians 1:6-9; 2:3-4); specifically, they thought that they needed to be circumcised (Leviticus 12:1-3; Acts 15:1, 5). Consequently, Paul was extremely upset with them, calling them foolish for doing so, and saying that they were severed from Christ in terms of their fellowship with Him (Galatians 3:1-5; 5:1-11). By doing these things, they were living as if they were being justified by works of the Law rather than through faith.[6]

What, then, does water baptism have to do with circumcision? Both were ordinances that were required by God until they were set aside by God. Those Galatian brethren who thought they were being obedient to God by submitting to circumcision did not understand that God did not require His people to keep only part of the Law, but that He required them to keep the whole Law of Moses (Galatians 3:10; 5:3). Water baptism was a requirement under the gospel of the kingdom, and the gospel of the kingdom included obedience to the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-20; 23:1-3; 28:19-20). Therefore, believers who think water baptism is an ordinance of God that we should obey are under obligation to keep the whole Law, which cannot be done because God figuratively nailed it to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:13-14). Because God nailed the Law to the cross, there are *no* ordinances to be obeyed during this dispensation of grace[7]—we live by faith instead of by works (Galatians 3:10-14; Romans 3:27-28).

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[6] Some brethren believe that circumcision for *any* reason is wrong today, but Scripture only addresses the practice in association with obedience to the Law of Moses. Therefore, I believe that it is not an issue with God if it is not done for spiritual reasons.

[7] This does not include ordinances of God that describe His sovereignty or character (Romans 13:1-2).

Salvation Apart from Water Baptism

Did water baptism save people? No; however, water baptism was a required part of the salvation process. The resurrected Lord Jesus confirmed this truth to His disciples before ascending into heaven.

> **And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved** [*does not believe*] **shall be condemned."** (Mark 16:15-16)

From the beginning, God has saved His people by His grace through faith (Acts 15:11). However, with perhaps the only exception being Abraham, works were always required as a demonstration of faith for salvation prior to the message preached by Paul.[8] That is, if a person did not do (or at least humbly try to do) what God told him to do (either directly, or through His angels, His prophets, Jesus, or His disciples), then it was proof of lack of faith. Until the gospel of grace was revealed to Paul, therefore, salvation consisted of a combination of faith *plus* works (James 2:18-26).

Would Noah have been saved, both physically and spiritually, had he not obeyed God and built the ark (Hebrews 11:7)? David knew in his heart that sacrifices did not actually take away his sins (Psalm 32:1-2; 40:6-8; Romans 4:6-8; Hebrews 10:4-10), but would he have been saved if he felt that obeying the Law of Moses by submitting to the required sacrifices was unnecessary? No, because disregarding the Law would have been proof of his unbelief.

The same was true for water baptism. If a person had supposedly believed the gospel but decided it was not worthwhile or necessary to be baptized, then his lack of baptism would have proven his disbelief (furthermore, submitting to water baptism without true faith was worthless—Acts 5:1-10; 8:9-24). An exception to this was the thief on the cross, who believed that Jesus was the Christ and believed in His kingdom, but did not have an opportunity to be baptized (Luke 23:39-43).

Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the gospel (good news), and Christians today are exhorted by our pastors and teachers to preach the gospel as Jesus commanded. But what, exactly, was the gospel that the disciples were supposed to preach? In the gospel accounts and in early part of the book of Acts, as explained in Chapter 4, the gospel was that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*. In other words, Israel's long-promised kingdom, with Messiah as King, was imminent (Matthew 9:35; 10:7; 24:14; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:17-26; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

> **Now in those days John the Baptist came, peaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (Matthew 3:1-2)

> **Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.** (Matthew 4:23)

Brethren, there was no gospel of salvation, per se. The good news was that the prophecies regarding Israel's promised kingdom were about to be fulfilled. The people of Israel were to believe this and then

[8] We are spiritually related to Abraham, who was a child of God prior to being circumcised and prior to the Law of Moses, because he believed God's promise and his faith was counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:1-6; Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6-9). It is interesting that James used a subsequent *action* of Abraham (in obedience to God) to demonstrate that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2:21-24). James' illustration applied to kingdom believers in his day and will also apply in the future. Brethren, we are justified apart from any works of righteousness in this dispensation of the grace of God (Romans 3:27-28; 4:4-5; 5:1-2, 6-11; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7).

undergo the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins—forgiveness was good news, but it was not presented as the gospel. However, there was more to faith than just believing in the coming kingdom. During John's baptisms, he spoke of the One who was to come, who was Jesus, *the* Christ (Messiah) of Israel (Matthew 3:11-12; John 1:19-41). Christ the Messiah, therefore, was the foundation (and author) of the kingdom gospel. Believing that Jesus was the Son of God and the Christ was the center of the gospel preached in the gospel accounts and continued through Peter's experience with Cornelius in the book of Acts (Matthew 14:33; 16:13-17; John 1:14-15; 3:16, 36; 4:25-26; Acts 2:22-36; 10:34-43).

Consider Apostle Peter's message to the Jews and Jewish proselytes at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36). There was no good news (gospel) of salvation in that message. Instead, he accused the people of Israel of killing Jesus, their prophesied Messiah. Peter went on to explain that God had raised Him from the dead and that He had ascended into heaven to the right hand of God. There was nothing about Jesus dying for their sins and that they were justified and made righteous through His resurrection. Several thousand people were personally convicted in their hearts for their responsibility in killing their Messiah, repented for doing so, and were baptized by the apostles for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-39).

Not long afterward, Peter spoke to the people again (Acts 3:11-26). He, again, accused the people of their responsibility in the crucifixion and told them that they (as well as the nation) had to repent for God to fulfill His promise regarding Israel's prophesied kingdom. There was no gospel of salvation in that message, either. Later, when speaking to the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43), Peter did not tell Cornelius that Christ had died for his sins, only that people would receive forgiveness of sins by believing what Peter said about Jesus Christ—that He was the One spoken of by the prophets. Receiving the forgiveness of sins certainly was good news, but Christ's redemptive work at the cross was not part of Peter's message at that time.

Why was it that Peter did not tell the people what Christ accomplished for us at the cross? It is because he did not know yet what had been accomplished. Only through Paul was the gospel of salvation first revealed to us. In fact, Paul was the only apostle to speak of Christ's redemptive work on the cross as the gospel by which we are saved.

> **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

This *good news* about Christ's death at the cross (see also Ephesians 1:13-14) had been kept secret by God until it was revealed to Paul as *the mystery* by our resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 2:6-8; Ephesians 3:1-12; Colossians 1:25-27). Through this gospel we learn that anyone who believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again is saved by the grace of God apart from any works on our part (including water baptism, obedience to the Law of Moses, etc.).

> **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Although by believing that Christ died for our sins is an admission that we are sinful and need salvation, repentance for remission of sins is not part of the gospel of salvation. When Paul spoke of repentance, it was to believers to encourage and exhort us to set aside our sinful ways and to live for Christ instead (II Corinthians 7:8-10; 12:19-21; II Timothy 2:24-25); that is, to consciously endeavor to change from living according to the

flesh to living by the Spirit. Repentance and water baptism for the remission of our sins is not part of the gospel of the grace of God in this dispensation of grace.

Should We Be Baptized?

There are many reasons Christians are baptized with water today, some of which are as follows:

1. To follow Jesus in baptism.
2. To be obedient to Jesus or God.
3. To be a testimony to others.
4. To symbolize our death, burial, and resurrection in Christ.
5. For repentance and remission of sins; to be saved.
6. To become a member of God's family.
7. To become a member of a denomination or of a specific church.
8. To receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
9. To experience the fulness of salvation.

Brethren, only the second, fifth, and eighth reasons in this list have a Scriptural basis. However, as demonstrated above, none of those three reasons apply in this dispensation of grace. But water baptism is a beautiful way to represent our identification with our Lord's Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, is it not? No, it is not. If God had wanted us to do this, then He would have instructed us to do so. By our making the decision that it is symbolic is adding to Scripture and making water baptism a work. Remember what Paul told the Galatian brethren about works for righteousness. There is only one baptism in this dispensation of grace, which is our spiritual baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.

What about those of us who have been water baptized? Truthfully, we were being disobedient to God and His written word. For those like me, however, we believed we were doing what was right. Please consider the record about Apollos in the book of Acts. Apollos was a Jew and a man of God who was diligently teaching what he knew to be true—the gospel of the kingdom, and repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. God used Priscilla and Aquila to explain to him the way of God *more accurately*. What they did was explain to Apollos the gospel of the grace of God that they had learned from Paul (Acts 18:1-3; Romans 16:3-5). By the grace of God, Apollos took this to heart and became a coworker of Paul in his ministry to the Gentiles (I Corinthians 3:6; 4:6; Titus 3:13). If we have been baptized but now understand that it was not necessary or even desired by God, then we, like Apollos, can move forward with a greater understanding of God's will. We can be even stronger in our daily walk for our Lord.

> **Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately** [diligently] **the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.** (Acts 18:24-26)

> **For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.** (Colossians 1:9-12)

Brethren, to teach others that we should, or must, be baptized with water for *any* reason is contrary to God's instructions to us—members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of the grace of God. Such teaching is a tradition of men and hinders our walk as children of God.

Communion

I hope I have adequately demonstrated that God does not command or even desire us to be baptized with water in this dispensation of grace. It was an ordinance of God—a requirement for obedience—until He set Israel and the Law of Moses aside. I also said that there are no ordinances that we are to obey in this dispensation. But what about communion? Most Christian denominations and independent churches believe that it is an ordinance of God or of Jesus Christ and include it in their tenets of faith.

The event we have come to call *communion* is referred to as such in I Corinthians 10:16 in the KJV. It is described as *sharing* or *participation* in other Bible versions such as the NASB, *New International Version*, and the *English Standard Version*. I continue to call it *communion* out of habit. The event is usually also called *the Lord's Supper*, as Paul referred to it in I Corinthians 11:20, and sometimes as *the Lord's table* (I Corinthians 10:21).

So, what is communion and should we observe it? Let us first see how it is portrayed in the Bible.

> **While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant** [testament]**, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."** (Matthew 26:26-29)

> **While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it** [Take, eat]**; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant** [new testament]**, which is poured out** [shed] **for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."** (Mark 14:22-25)

> **And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten** [after supper]**, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood** [This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you]**."** (Luke 22:17-20)

> **For I** [*Paul*] **received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant** [testament] **in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.** (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

If we compare the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke with Paul's instructions, we will see that there are some important differences (there is no account in the book of John). When Jesus was with His disciples,

he was observing the Passover meal with them according to the requirements of the first Passover and of the Law of Moses (Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-16; John 13:1-4; Exodus 12:1-28; Leviticus 23:4-8). This was the last meal that Jesus ate with His disciples before His crucifixion (He ate with them after His resurrection—Luke 24:41-43; John 21:9-15), so it has traditionally been called *the Last Supper* even though that meal is not called as such in Scripture. Before ending their meal together (Luke 22:20), which consisted of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (wine was not part of the observance—Exodus 12:8), Jesus shared unleavened bread and wine with the disciples, relating those items to His pending crucifixion that the disciples did not understand would occur.

The first Passover occurred as commanded by the Lord to Moses and Aaron and signified a judgment of God against the firstborn (of man and beast) of every house in Egypt prior to Israel's escape. The name *Passover* was derived from the work of the destroyer of the Lord passing over the houses (instead of killing the firstborn) of the Israelites that had blood of a lamb applied to the doorways in a specified manner (Exodus 12:1-13). That day was to be memorialized as a permanent ordinance and observed at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread on a specific day of a specific month each year (Exodus 12:14-25). This feast was incorporated into the Law of Moses (Leviticus 23:4-8; Deuteronomy 16:1-8) and was observed by Jesus and His disciples.

The Passover meal, therefore, was an ordinance of God and the Law of Moses memorializing a specific event, but the sharing of bread and wine *after* the meal (so as not to modify the intent or purpose of the Passover meal) was never called an ordinance because it was not an ordinance (nothing could be added to the Law—Deuteronomy 4:1-2). Jesus told His disciples to partake of the bread in remembrance of Him because He knew that He would soon be crucified—His body would be broken (Luke 22:15-16, 19). However, He did not say that the sharing prophetically represented the Passover meal or that it replaced the Passover meal. Nor did He instruct or command the disciples to repeat the sharing as a remembrance of His death during subsequent yearly observances of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread or tell others to do so.

I think it is important to note a misconception held by some regarding the Passover meal, who consider it to be representative of the future sacrifice of Christ for our sins. In Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7-9, the NASB says that the lamb was *sacrificed* whereas the KJV says it was *killed*. Sacrifices to atone for or cover sin under the Law of Moses were performed by Levitical priests, but the lambs eaten on the first Passover before leaving Egypt were killed in each household (Exodus 12:1-8); there was no connection with forgiveness of sins. Therefore, the Passover lamb was not sacrificed as an atonement for sin but simply killed (i.e., its life was sacrificed) to roast and eat. It is not up to us to imply that the Passover lamb prophetically spoke of the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of our sins (John 1:29). A review of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John will show how everything Jesus did and the events surrounding Him were in fulfillment of specific prophecies. No such mention is made regarding the Passover meal prior to our Lord's crucifixion—it was and continued to be a memorial as described and ordained in Exodus 12.

In his letter to the Corinthian brethren, who he had established in the faith and with whom he had spent eighteen months teaching the word of God (Acts 18:1-11), Paul reminded them that he had received instructions from Christ Himself (through a revelation) regarding what we have come to call *communion*. That is, Paul did not learn if from the other apostles. It differed in several ways from what our Lord said according to the accounts in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in the context of the event prior to Christ's crucifixion. In Paul's instructions:

- There is no mention of, or connection with, the Jewish Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Therefore, it was not associated in any way with the Law of Moses.
- Its observance was not associated with a meal—Passover or otherwise. That is, when the believers met it was not to eat the Lord's supper as a meal; instead, they were to eat their meals at home so that communion would not be mistakenly (and abusively) eaten as a meal (I Corinthians 11:19-22, 33-34).
- He verified that partaking of the bread and wine occurred after the meal, or supper, which he did not call the Passover meal (I Corinthians 11:25).
- Communion was to be repeated but at unspecified times—*as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup* (I Corinthians 11:26).
- The purpose of communion was to proclaim our Lord's death until He comes (I Corinthians 11:26).
- Prior to and during the partaking of communion was to be a time of self-examination to avoid eating the bread and drinking from the cup in an unworthy manner (I Corinthians 11:27-32).

Please note that participating in communion applied to all believers, there is no mention of unleavened bread or the fruit of the vine, and Paul adds instructions about partaking in a worthy manner. Furthermore, we are to observe it *until He comes*. I will elaborate on these observations in the following section on the new covenant.

The New Covenant

In the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as well as in the instructions by Paul, the cup (i.e., the wine) represented the new covenant (new testament) of Christ's blood. What is meant by *new covenant* in these passages?

It is a fact that Christ died on the cross and shed His blood for our forgiveness, and that His sacrifice covers sins for all time (Hebrews 10:11-14; Romans 3:25). Everyone who believes the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead—is saved from the consequences of their sins because of the shed blood of Christ (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11; 6:3-11; 8:1-4; Ephesians 1:7). But is this what Jesus was talking about when sharing the cup with His disciples?

Please consider all three accounts of our Lord's words to His disciples regarding the new covenant or testament.

> **"For this** [*wine*] **is My blood of the covenant** [new testament]**, which is poured out** [shed] **for many for forgiveness** [the remission] **of sins."** (Matthew 26:28)

> **And He** [*Jesus*] **said to them, "This** [*wine*] **is My blood of the covenant** [new testament]**, which is poured out** [shed] **for many."** (Mark 14:24)

> **And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup** [*wine*] **which is poured out** [shed] **for you is the new covenant** [testament] **in My blood."** (Luke 22:20)

Jesus was not proclaiming the gospel of salvation at this time—He did not do so until He did through Paul. The new covenant He was referring to was the same new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and spoken of by Moses (Deuteronomy 30:6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:24). That is, Jesus was proclaiming to His disciples that He was about to shed His blood and that it would be for the forgiveness of the sins of His people so that they could inherit their prophesied kingdom. His shed blood, therefore, was required to fulfill those prophecies. Furthermore, the *many* mentioned in Matthew 26:28 and Mark 14:24 were the *called* or *sanctified* of Israel (Hebrews 9:15; 10:14) and not Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34; see also Hebrews 8:8-12)

Both the old covenant (the Law of Moses) and the new covenant, referred to by Jesus and explained in Hebrews, were between God and His chosen nation of Israel. According to God's covenant with Abraham, God would make him into a great nation (Israel) and that the Gentile nations would be blessed through his seed—Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16). The covenant with Abraham, therefore, will be fulfilled when the new covenant with Israel is fulfilled. The Gentile nations are not being blessed in this dispensation of grace, for Israel has not been redeemed by God and there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. God's covenant with David will also be fulfilled when the new covenant is fulfilled when Christ (the son of David—Matthew 1:1) rules over Israel and the Gentile nations as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Revelation 19:11-16; 21:5).

But what about the communion service that was revealed to us by Paul? Does it not say the same thing about the new covenant as Jesus said to His disciples, thus making a direct application to us? What does Scripture say?

Regarding the communion service, Paul began by reminding the Corinthian believers that he had received from the Lord—our glorified Lord Jesus Christ through a revelation—the observance that he was about to further explain or reinforce. Keep in mind that Paul did not talk about his own personal thoughts or his interpretation about what Jesus said to His disciples—he told the Corinthians what our Lord instructed him to say. What Paul conveyed to the Corinthian brethren, and us, differed from that which Jesus said to His disciples. In what way, and why did he do so? Please consider the following:

- Jesus told His disciples that His blood was about to be shed for many for the remission of their sins. As mentioned above, the *many* would be from among the people of Israel when God redeemed His people. In the communion service, however, Paul left out the forgiveness of sins part even though Christ died for our sins; our observance is not about Israel's future redemption.
- Jesus said that He would not eat the Passover feast again until He would do so in His Father's kingdom (Luke 22:14-16). He was referring to the prophesied kingdom that was proclaimed as *at hand* (imminent) by John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, and His disciples (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; see also Acts 3:17-26), and for which they would be resurrected to serve with Him (Matthew 19:27-28).
- Jesus did not tell His disciples to repeat the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup, and there is no record in Scripture that they did so. It was a one-time occasion associated with that specific Passover observance so that the disciples would remember what Jesus was about to do for them. The revelation by Christ to Paul, however, said *for as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup*, meaning that the observance was to be repeated (although not at any particular time because there are no holy days in this dispensation of grace).
- Jesus said to eat the bread and drink of the cup in remembrance of Him. Even though He told them He would be put to death, they did not yet understand this (Luke 24:36-47). They did,

however, expect the kingdom to be established soon because that is what they had been preaching (Matthew 10:5-7; see also Acts 1:6).

- On the other hand, Paul said to partake of communion to proclaim Christ's death until He comes, which Jesus did not say to His disciples. It is to be done to remind ourselves of His sacrificial death on the cross for us and repeated until the rapture when Christ comes to gather us unto Himself (instead of His coming to establish Israel's promised kingdom).
- Furthermore, Paul revealed that it was also to be an occasion of self-examination (self-judgment) of our individual conduct as we humbly remember what Christ did for us at the cross (I Corinthians 11:27-32), something that Jesus did not say to His disciples.

There are important differences, therefore, between what Jesus told His disciples and what our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ instructed Paul to tell us. But did not Paul quote part of the new covenant? Yes, he did, and I believe it was included because the new covenant included the forgiveness of sins. Although that forgiveness was directed to the people of Israel, it was later, through Paul, that we find out that Christ's work at the cross was for the forgiveness of sins for all of God's people, whether Jew or Gentile, apart from Israel's promises and for all time.

Another New Covenant

Paul mentions a *new covenant* twice in his letters. The first time is in the context of communion and is referring to the same new covenant that Jesus did with His disciples. While only calling it a *covenant*, He also referred to that same new covenant in the context of God fulfilling His promise to Israel in the future (Romans 11:25-27). However, the second time Paul used the term *new covenant* is a reference to a different covenant.

> **Such confidence we** [*Paul and Timothy*] **have through Christ toward** [*before*] **God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant** [testament]**, not of the letter** [*Law of Moses*] **but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.** (II Corinthians 3:4-6)

Before addressing this passage, one may ask how there could be more than one *new covenant* in Scripture. As already addressed in this book, there is more than one law in Scripture as well as more than one kingdom, gospel, baptism, and return of Christ. These and other terms have more than one meaning because of the differences between what is revealed through prophecy versus the mystery and what applies to Israel versus the body of Christ (us). Therefore, it should not be a surprise that there is more than one new covenant.

Recall that Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the covenant being instituted when God writes the Law (the law of God, which is the Law of Moses) on the hearts of His redeemed people of Israel so that they would be sinless and automatically obey Him (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27). In II Corinthians 3:6, however, Paul said he was a minister of a new covenant that is not of the Law of Moses but of the Holy Spirit. Because God has set aside the Law during this dispensation of His grace and saves us by His grace through faith apart from works of the Law (or any works), then the new covenant spoken of by Paul was referring to God's administration of grace. It encompasses all the content—the purpose, commandments, and promises—of the gospel of grace as revealed by Christ to Paul.

The new covenant revealed through Paul is not the same as the new covenant prophesied in the Old Testament and spoken of by Jesus with His disciples. They are related, however, but in what way? We saw above that the prophesied new covenant is based on the shed blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Brethren, Christ's work at the cross is the foundation and center of the entire Bible even though it was not

explained until Paul did so. Our new covenant, therefore, incorporates and is based on the foundation of Israel's new covenant—Christ's shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Is Christ Our Passover?

> **Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven** [*yeast*] **leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out** [purge] **the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.** (I Corinthians 5:6-8)

Some Christian denominations, independent churches, and individuals celebrate Passover or some form of it. Most often, it is done so because of a perceived connection, symbolism, or prophetic fulfillment of Christ's death for our sins. Brethren, as demonstrated throughout this book, we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses and there are no holy days, weeks, months, seasons, or years that we are to observe or celebrate in this dispensation of the grace of God—including Passover (Galatians 3:1-3, 10-14; 4:9-11; Colossians 2:13-14).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was also called *the Feast of the Passover* (Luke 2:41; John 13:1) or simply *the Passover* (Luke 22:1; John 2:23) in the New Testament. In every instance but one, not counting its mistranslation as *Easter* in the KJV in Acts 12:4, the Greek word *paska* is translated as *Passover* in the context of observing the Passover in accordance with the Law of Moses. The one exception is in I Corinthians 5:7 where Paul refers to *Christ our Passover*. In the fifth chapter of I Corinthians, Paul was not describing the observance of the Passover meal or the Feast of Unleavened Bread; instead, he was describing sexual immorality and avoiding it because of Christ's sacrifice for us. So, what did he mean by *Christ our Passover*?

Christ died to sin, once for all (Romans 6:10). His life was sacrificed for us—through His shed blood we have forgiveness of our sins (Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 1:7). Upon believing the gospel of salvation, we are identified with Christ through His death, burial, and resurrection: His death is our death, His burial is our burial, and His resurrection is our resurrection (Romans 6:3-9). God considers His children to be dead to sin and alive in Christ (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 3:3-4). Furthermore, God considers us righteous in Christ despite our sin (Romans 8:10; 10:8-10; II Corinthians 5:21). Consequently, I believe that referring to Christ as our Passover in I Corinthians 5:7 signifies His sacrificial death for us and has no connection with the ordinance of the Passover observance.

Paul provided an analogy about leaven and unleavened dough to differentiate our old sinful nature from our new nature in Christ (derived from His sacrifice for us) and to show how easily immorality (leaven), or any sin we accept amongst ourselves, can spread through and degrade a body of believers—*a little leaven leavens the whole lump*. When viewed in the context of I Corinthians 5, I believe that Paul was describing the work of Christ at the cross and exhorting the Corinthian brethren to appropriate that work and conduct their lives accordingly. The intent of this passage was about the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ for us (Romans 3:25). As already demonstrated, Passover never represented forgiveness of sins, and Jesus' observance with the bread and cup was after the Passover meal and did not represent or symbolize the Passover.

But is not Christ the Lamb of God? Yes. He came as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), was crucified (sacrificed) as a lamb (Acts 8:32; I Peter 1:17-19), and will return to govern His kingdom and the world as *the* Lamb (Revelation 21:14, 22-23; 22:1-3). All references in Scripture regarding Christ as the Lamb are in reference to Israel and its promises. Not once is He called or referred to as a *lamb* or *the Lamb* in Paul's letters. I believe this is significant and further demonstrates that Israel has been set aside by God during this dispensation of

His grace and that we are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses. Brethren, we are members of the body of Christ, and our position is already in heaven—we cannot claim Israel's promises and we are not to observe the ordinances and statutes of the Law of Moses, including the Passover.

Should We Observe Communion?

Why would I even ask such a question? I do so because most of Christianity believes that it is an ordinance that we are to obey; however, there are no ordinances in this dispensation of grace. Please recall that Jesus did not say that eating of the bread and drinking of the cup was in fulfillment of the original Passover meal or symbolic of the Passover meal—the disciples would continue to observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:1-4) until God blinded Israel and removed the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses.

When and how the Lord's Supper or communion is observed today, as well as its purpose and meaning, depends on the denomination or independent church. I will not go into all the different ways it is observed, but many things that are done or attributed to the observation are contrary to Scripture. I have participated in communion at denominational and independent churches and during Bible study meetings, and none were the same. Other than being too somber or ritualistic in some instances, I recall them being scripturally correct for the most part as they generally followed Paul's example (although not always mentioning or emphasizing our partaking of it in a worthy manner).

But again, should we observe communion? First, please consider the following cautions, as I understand them:

- We must not tie it to the Passover (or the Law of Moses) or make it a sacred ritual (the bread and beverage are not special or sacred) or a work. We must be careful not to add denominational or religious symbolism or requirements.
- It does not have to be administered by a pastor, reverend, priest, elder, man, etc.
- It does not need to be conducted in a church.
- The bread does not need to be unleavened; maybe it would be better if it were leavened to avoid a connection with the Passover (I have used French bread).
- Grape juice is as much a fruit of the vine as wine, so it is an acceptable substitute. Perhaps it does not even need to be a fruit of the vine because that information is not included in Paul's instructions (he only mentions *the cup*).
- We should not judge others whether we think they are worthy or not to partake—that is between them and God.
- We should not judge others for not participating in communion.
- Although not a sacred ritual, partaking of communion—sharing in Christ's death for us—is not a frivolous matter to be taken lightly.

Perhaps we should not be asking, "Should we observe communion?" It is not an ordinance and was not presented as a command by Paul; that is, unlike all the exhortations regarding our walk as believers, we are not told to observe communion in obedience to God. Maybe a better question is, "Is it a good thing, as members of the body of Christ, to observe communion?" I believe that the answer to that is "Yes" because it is part of the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God. It is an opportunity to focus on and share with our fellow brethren the blessed work that Christ accomplished for us at the cross. It is also a reminder to introspectively evaluate our own walk as believers. We must be careful, however, not to abuse it as the Corinthian brethren were doing.

Perhaps, also, it is OK not to observe communion. Do we need to participate in an observance to think about what Christ did for us at the cross and whether our conduct and thoughts are representative of that work—are we walking worthy of our salvation in and through Christ? Are these not things we should think about anyway (Colossians 3:1-11; Philippians 4:8-9; II Corinthians 13:5)? I believe that whether to observe communion, and who should administer it, can be decided by the brethren who fellowship in the word together.

Sign Gifts

> **"These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name** [*Jesus*] **they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."** (Mark 16:17-18)
>
> **Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38)
>
> **Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through** [by] **the apostles.** (Acts 2:43)

As we have seen, the ability to perform miraculous signs and wonders was included as part of *the great commission* and was associated with water baptism. These signs and wonders—attesting miracles—were a demonstration of the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:1-4) and are identified by some as *sign gifts* as I do in this chapter.

Some Christian denominations, independent churches, and sects strongly teach that believers can, and should, exercise the gift of the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues and performing miracles. But are these signs and wonders miracles of God? Does He bestow on us the power of the Holy Spirit when we are saved?

In the previous section, I demonstrated that we are *not* baptized by Christ with the Holy Spirit in this dispensation of grace; instead, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. There is one baptism today—the latter one. I also said that sign gifts, derived by the power of the Holy Spirit, have passed away. What did I mean that they have passed away? Is this merely my opinion? Some brethren, as well as those who falsely profess to be believers, are convinced that they have the gift of the Holy Spirit and do miraculous things such as speaking in tongues, healing people, casting out (exorcising) evil spirits, etc. Who am I to say that they are wrong? What does Scripture say?

Miracles were performed by the twelve apostles and other disciples in accordance with *the great commission* and as recorded in the book of Acts (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 2:1-6, 43; 3:1-10; 4:29-33; 5:1-10, 12-16; 6:8; 8:6-7; 9:36-42). Just as the miracles performed by Jesus were proof that He was who He said He was (John 2:11; Acts 2:22), the demonstration of miraculous sign gifts by the apostles and disciples proved that they were truly representing the resurrected Jesus Christ as they preached the gospel of the kingdom to the people of Israel (Acts 2:43; 4:29-30; 5:12).

During the early part of his ministry, Paul also spoke in tongues and performed many miracles including casting out demons, healing the sick or lame, and raising the dead (Acts 13:6-12; 14:3, 8-10; 16:16-18; 19:6, 11-12; 20:7-12; 28:8-9; I Corinthians 14:18-19). He was even bitten by a venomous snake and did not suffer harm (Acts 28:1-6; see Mark 16:18). The purpose of Paul's miracles was to prove to the Jews that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ—it was his primary credential as an apostle in their eyes (Acts 15:6-12; I Corinthians 1:22). However, despite going to the synagogues first, most of the Jews in the Gentile cities rejected Paul's testimony and teaching, just as the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea had rejected the teaching of Jesus and His

disciples. Therefore, according to His eternal plan that He had hidden in Himself (the mystery), God set Israel aside and temporarily blinded (hardened) the nation to the truth of God, which continues to this day because God is still dealing with the Gentiles through grace instead of judgment (Romans 11:25-32; II Corinthians 3:14-15; see also Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:25-28).

> **I** [*Paul*] **have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** (II Corinthians 12:11-12)

> **For I** [*Paul*] **do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial** [*temporary*] **hardening** [blindness] **has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** (Romans 11:25)

With the setting aside of Israel, there was no longer a need for miraculous signs. Only in his first letter to the Corinthian brethren did Paul mention sign gifts and, in that letter, he said that they would pass away. It is interesting that the Corinthian brethren, apparently the least spiritually mature believers Paul ministered to (I Corinthians 3:1-3; 4:6-7), exhibited sign gifts. Unlike the believers during the early Acts period who were controlled by the Holy Spirit and used their sign gifts according to the will of God (Acts 8:18-24), the Corinthian brethren were guilty of misusing them, particularly the gift of tongues (I Corinthians 14:1-40). During the latter part of his ministry, Paul was unable to heal his coworkers, which signified that sign gifts had indeed passed away as he said they would (Philippians 2:25-27; I Timothy 5:23; II Timothy 4:20).

> **Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect** [*that which is complete*] **comes, the partial will be done away. When I** [*Paul*] **was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.** (I Corinthians 13:8-13)

Brethren, God is *not* performing miracles through the agency of man as He did during the Acts period (which includes the time Paul ministered to the Corinthian brethren)—no one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit today in this dispensation of grace. Anyone who claims to have the gift of tongues, healing, etc., is taking the name of God in vain and is serving someone other than God, whether they realize it or not. Therefore, any so-called or self-proclaimed miraculous gifts exercised in this day are either imagined, the work of our old sin nature, the work of Satan who deceivingly operates as an angel of light, or the work of Satan's servants who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:13-15; Colossians 2:16-23).[9]

I am not saying that God does not perform miracles today. For example, it is miraculous when a person is saved because that person is transformed from spiritual death to life by the working of God (Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 2:9-14; II Corinthians 5:17-19). I cannot say for certain, but I would not be surprised if God is performing physical miracles among us according to His predetermined will. If so, He is doing it in a manner such that no person can fully recognize them as His miracles (i.e., we may correctly assume they are miracles but cannot prove that they are) or take credit for them through their own work or prayers. Teaching that we

[9] Satan's work is deceptive in this dispensation of grace. When the gospel of the kingdom resumes after *the rapture*, however, his work will be obvious as he will prowl about like a lion (I Peter 5:8).

have the promise of receiving the power of the Holy Spirit and that we can and should exercise that power by performing sign gifts, however, is a tradition of men and is disobedient to God.

Christ the Messiah and King

Everyone knows that Christ is our Messiah and our King. That is what I was taught with absolute certainty in the churches I attended during my youth. But is He *our* Messiah? Is He *our* King? What does Scripture say? Let us focus on Christ as Messiah first, but it should become apparent that Christ the Messiah and Christ the King go hand in hand—they are inseparable.

What is meant by *Messiah* and are we applying it correctly to our Lord? In some Bible versions, the word *Messiah* appears often, especially in the New Testament. In others, however, it appears only a few times. Why is this? I believe that this is an instance where it is necessary to investigate how *Messiah* is used in the early Hebrew and Greek texts from which our English Bible was translated to see if this discrepancy is important or not.

As that foundation is set, we will look at what *Messiah* means and if Christ is our Messiah. Brethren, it is important for us to understand how God expects us to know Him and our Lord and how to live each day as believers. Are we to view Jesus as our Messiah and know (i.e., understand, obey, and follow) Him as the One who lived as a man among His people? Or are we to know our Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died for our sins, was buried, was resurrected, and who returned to His position of glory at the right hand of God in the heavens? Is there even such a difference—am I making something out of nothing?

Messiah in Scripture

New Testament

Although there are variations among the many English Bible versions (as addressed later), the word *Messiah* appears only twice in the New Testament in the KJV and in early editions of the NASB. Both occurrences are in the book of John. Later editions of the NASB replaced *Christ* with *the Messiah* in some verses (e.g., Matthew 1:17; 2:4). Although referring to the same person, I believe this was an incorrect translation change that I will address.

> **One of the two who heard John** [*the Baptist*] **speak and followed Him** [*Jesus*]**, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means** [the] **Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter** [A stone]**)."** (John 1:40-42)

> **The** [*Samaritan*] **woman said to Him** [*Jesus*]**, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."** (John 4:25-26)

The Greek word translated as *Messiah* is *Messias*, and it appears only twice—in John 1:41 and John 4:25. That is, *Messias* is not translated any other way. From John 1:41 we know that the word means *Christ*, so *the Messiah* is referring to *the Christ*. And we know from John 4:26 that Jesus confirmed to the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah who was prophesied to come to Israel.

> **So the woman left her waterpot, and went into the city and said to the men, "Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?"** (John 4:28-29)

It is interesting to note that the Messiah was first revealed to or recognized as such by men of Judea—John the Baptist and his disciple Andrew who became a disciple of Jesus. Later, Jesus confirmed to a Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah that she was expecting to come. Why would a Samaritan woman expect the Messiah? I believe that this is a significant sequence of events and I will address it later.

The name *Christ*, or *the Christ*, does not appear in the Old Testament. However, King Herod of Judea knew that *the Christ* (a ruler of Israel) had been prophesied and inquired of the chief priests and scribes as to where this ruler was to be born. They correctly referred to a prophecy of Micah that says that the ruler would come out of Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah[10] (Matthew 2:1-6; Micah 5:2-4).

Old Testament

As in the New Testament, the word *Messiah* appears only twice in the Old Testament in the KJV and NASB. Both occurrences are in one passage in the book of Daniel.

> **"Seventy weeks** [*units of seven*] **have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.**[11] **So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined."** (Daniel 9:24-26)

The Hebrew word translated as *Messiah* is *mashiach*, which apparently is equivalent to the Greek word *Messias*. It is translated as such in the Old Testament only in Daniel 9:25-26. The same Hebrew word also appears 37 other times where it is translated as *anointed*, *the anointed*, *His anointed*, *My anointed*, and *Your anointed*. In these instances, the object of anointing usually is a specific king, whether a king of Israel or a Gentile king (Isaiah 45:1), but sometimes is a priest (or priests) or the nation of Israel. Additionally, at least one use of the word appears to be a prophetic veiled reference to Christ as the anointed of God (Psalm 2:2).

Verses such as I Samuel 2:10, II Samuel 22:51, II Chronicles 6:42, Psalm 18:50, Psalm 132:10, and Psalm 132:17 that contain the word *mashiach* are often understood to be prophecies about Christ, but their context seems to indicate that they might be referring to the nation of Israel or its current king (often David) and his descendants as the anointed of God. I admit, however, that one or more (perhaps even all) the verses referring to David and his descendants being anointed might have a double meaning. That is, they could be describing David and subsequent kings and could also be prophetic about Christ because when Ezekiel prophesied of David sitting the throne forever, he was unknowingly prophesying about Christ (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Matthew 1:1). I confess my uncertainty in this matter.

The Anointed

The Hebrew word for Messiah, therefore, refers to someone who is anointed. What is meant by *anointed* in a scriptural context? In general, the act of anointing, usually translated from the Hebrew word *mashach*

[10] The land of the tribe of Judah was part of Judea in the New Testament.

[11] NASB translators added the word *place*, which suggests that the verse is referring to the anointing of the holy city. The KJV does not have the word *place* and implies that the verse is referring to the anointing of Messiah the Prince. I am not certain, but the NASB translation seems to agree with the context of the passage.

(notice the different spelling), involved the application or smearing of oil on a person or object (e.g., an altar) for a specific purpose (Exodus 28:40-41; 29:4-9, 35-37; 30:22-33). When *anointed* is translated from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, it refers not to the physical act of anointing but the consecration of someone or something by God or for service to God as described in the following example verses and passages.

An Anointed King

So he [*David*] **said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the Lord** [*God*] **that I should do this thing to my lord** [master, *King Saul*]**, the Lord's anointed** [*mashiach*]**, to stretch out my hand against** [*kill*] **him, since he is the Lord's anointed** [*mashiach*]**."** (I Samuel 24:6)

Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares, the anointed [*mashiach*] **of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel.** (II Samuel 23:1)

Thus says the Lord to Cyrus [*King of Persia*] **His anointed** [*mashiach*]**, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor, though you have not known Me."**[12] (Isaiah 45:1-4)

An Anointed Priest

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "This is the offering which Aaron and his sons are to present to the Lord on the day when he is anointed [*mashach*]**; the tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it in the evening. It shall be prepared with oil on a griddle. When it is well stirred, you shall bring it. You shall present the grain offering in baked pieces as a soothing aroma to the Lord. The anointed** [*mashiach*] **priest who will be in his place among his sons shall offer it. By a permanent ordinance it shall be entirely offered up in smoke to the Lord. So every grain offering of the priest shall be burned entirely. It shall not be eaten."** (Leviticus 6:19-23)

The Anointed Nation of Israel

"Do not touch My [*God's*] **anointed ones** [*mashiach*; *the people of Israel*]**, and do My prophets no harm."** (I Chronicles 16:22)

The Lord is their strength, and He is a saving defense to His anointed [*mashiach*; *Israel*]**. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance; be their shepherd also, and carry them forever.** (Psalm 28:8-9)

Christ the Anointed

The name *Christ* is often defined to mean *the anointed one*, but our Lord is not directly called as such in Scripture. However, because *mashiach* means *anointed*, the translation of *Messiah* in Daniel 9:25-26 can correctly be considered to mean *the anointed* or the anointed one of God. Isaiah also prophesied about Christ

[12] This is an example of a nonbelieving Gentile king being appointed (anointed) by God to unknowingly serve His purposes (see also Romans 9:14-21; 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-17).

whom God has anointed. God did spiritually anoint His Son, as confirmed in Luke 4:16-21, Acts 4:27-28, Acts 10:38, and Hebrews 1:9, consecrating Him to do His work for God the Father (John 4:34; 17:4).

> **Why are the nations** [heathen; *Gentiles*] **in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord** [*God*] **and against His Anointed** [*mashiach; Christ*]**, saying, "let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"** (Psalm 2:1-3)

> **The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me** [*Christ*]**, because the Lord has anointed** [*mashach*] **me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks** [trees] **of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.** (Isaiah 61:1-3; see also Luke 4:16-19; Hebrews 1:8-9)

> **"For truly in this city** [*Jerusalem*] **there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You** [*God*] **anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined** [determined before] **to occur."** (Acts 4:27-28)

> **"You** [*Cornelius*] **know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."** (Acts 10:38)

I believe that Psalm 2:1-3 is a prophecy directly about Christ the Messiah and not the nation of Israel that will also be anointed by God. The full prophecy includes God's proclamation that He has installed His King (Christ) on Mount Zion and that He is ruling over the nations with a *rod of iron* (Psalm 2:4-9; see also Revelation 2:25-27; 19:15-16). This prophecy, therefore, appears to be about the millennial kingdom (after the tribulation judgments and Armageddon) and the time at its close when *all* the nations will rise up together and wage war against new Jerusalem and Christ the King of kings (Revelation 20:7-10).

Bible Version Differences

The KJV and the NASB are English translations of ancient Hebrew and Greek texts. Although there are some differences in translated words, phrases, and sentences (i.e., one or the other version may be correct, or more appropriate), the translations are remarkably close with the main differences being that the KJV uses English words and grammar from the time of King James (late 1500s to early 1600s)[13] versus the NASB that uses American English from the latter part of the twentieth century. Close examination of these versions indicates that the translators of both versions, who vigorously and commendably tried to be as accurate as possible, occasionally interjected their own interpretations (probably due to traditional Christian teaching or to bias from influences outside of Scripture) thus introducing some error into them. These errors, often incorporated into subsequent Bible versions, are usually discernable through an understanding of the relevant scriptural context in which they occur.

[13] King James, who reigned as King James I of England and Ireland from 1603 to 1625 (and previously as King James VI of Scotland beginning in 1567), authorized the translation of the Bible into English that became known as the *King James Version*. This action, at least in part, was in response to a Latin translation (the *Vulgate*) used by the Holy Roman Empire, which exerted power over continental Europe through the Roman Catholic Church.

I realize that my position on translations is vigorously challenged by fellow brethren who believe that the KJV is the inerrant word of God. However, although the word of God was written by men who were inspired by God through His Holy Spirit (II Samuel 23:1-2; II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:20-21), it was not translated by inspiration of God but by dedicated people with good intentions who were influenced by their sin nature. Thankfully, God has preserved His word through the ages, and He worked through these translators to accomplish His will (I Peter 1:22-25). Although I do not focus on translation errors, this book and some of my studies provide examples of what I am convinced are interpretational biases introduced into the KJV and subsequent English versions.

Most other English Bible versions, however, have been developed from the KJV or subsequent versions to use modern English words to make them more reader friendly. Therefore, they are interpretations (and some are paraphrases) instead of translations. By doing so opens the door for interpretation errors because the meaning of the original texts can be misunderstood, overlooked, or lost.

In the context of this study, for example, some Bible versions often replace occurrences of the name *Christ* with *Messiah*. The name *Christ* is translated from the Greek word *Kristos* (or *Christŏs*) and not from *Messias*, which refers to a title or position of our Lord. Even though *the Messiah* is translated to mean *the Christ* as revealed in John 1:41 (KJV), I do not believe it is correct to assume that the name *Christ* (from *Kristos*) should or can be revised as *Messiah*. For example, the name of our Savior is not the Lord Jesus Messiah (I Corinthians 1:1-2; 6:11; Ephesians 5:20), and the Messiah is not in us and we are not in Him—we are in Christ and are members of His body (Romans 8:1, 10-11; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). This may sound picky, but there is a reason why both *Messias* and *Kristos* are used in Scripture.

Christ as Savior

As we have seen, *Messiah* means *anointed*. Traditional Christian teaching, however, has translated *Messiah* to mean *our Savior*. Consequently, most of us believe that Christ is our Messiah. We need to examine Scripture to see how *Savior* is used.

Israel's Savior

There is a difference in the roles between Christ the Messiah and that of our Lord Jesus Christ who is referred to as *Christ* (without the definite article *the*), *Jesus Christ*, and *Christ Jesus* in Scripture. Although they are the same person (the Son of God), the prophesied Messiah had to do with Israel's future national savior—He came as Israel's Messiah and will fulfill that role when His kingdom is established. Therefore, references to *the Messiah* and *the Christ* are titles in the same sense that He will be *King* (Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 27:11; Revelation 19:11-16). The Old Testament prophesies, though veiled (i.e., they were about the Messiah but not explicitly stated as such except in Daniel 9:25-26), were concisely summarized by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist.

> **And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people** [*Israel*]**, and has raised up a horn of salvation** [*Christ the Messiah*] **for us in the house of David His servant—as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old** [since the world began]**—salvation** [*deliverance*] **from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we** [*Israel*]**, being rescued** [delivered] **from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him** [*God*] **without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you** [*John*]**, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High** [*God*]**; for you will go on before the Lord** [*Christ*] **to prepare His ways; to**

give to His people [*Israel*] **the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise** [dayspring; *Christ*] **from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."** (Luke 1:67-79)

As revealed in this passage, John the Baptist was prophesied to prepare the nation of Israel for its promised Messiah who would save—or deliver—the nation from its enemies and establish its long-promised kingdom. This preparation would include John being used by God to provide the knowledge of salvation to change the people from being disobedient to being righteous (Luke 1:17; 3:1-6; Malachi 4:5-6).

Israel had been waiting for its promised Messiah and kingdom. The Gentile magi went to Jerusalem to find and worship (pay homage to) the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1-2). Christ indeed came to Israel (Judea in particular) to be their Messiah and King and confirmed that He was both (John 4:25-26; Matthew 27:11). However, Israel rejected Him as their Messiah and King and had Him crucified at the hands of the Roman government (John 1:11; Matthew 27:19-26; Acts 2:22-23; 3:12-15). This was not a surprise to God because these events were prophesied (Psalm 22:16-18; Isaiah 53:4-7)—it was all according to His eternal predetermined plan (Acts 2:22-23; 3:18; 4:27-28). Despite Israel's rejection of its Messiah, it was prophesied that Israel would, indeed, see the restoration of its kingdom with the descendent of David (Christ) sitting on its throne (Ezekiel 36:22-36; 37:15-28). The prophecies referred to by Peter shortly after Pentecost will be fulfilled when new Jerusalem is established and Christ the Messiah reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16; 21:22-27).

"And now, brethren [*men of Israel—Acts 3:12*]**, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing** [*Israel's prophesied restoration and redemption*] **may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time** [since the world began]**. Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him** [*Christ*] **you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed** [*Christ—Galatians 3:16*] **all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you** [*Israel*] **first, God raised up His Servant** [Son Jesus] **and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."** (Acts 3:17-26)

Despite Peter's offer of the kingdom to Israel, the nation continued to reject Christ as its Messiah and did not repent. The religious leaders of Israel proved their rejection by stoning the disciple Steven even though he spoke the truth under the control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:8 – 7:60). Therefore, Christ the Messiah has not restored His nation and established His kingdom yet. That prophetic plan was interrupted by God when He blinded Israel to His truth and temporarily set the nation aside—a condition that still exists (Romans 11:25). Instead, God instituted His dispensation of grace through Paul (the apostle of the Gentiles—Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1, 11-12), His chosen instrument to reveal His eternal plan (Ephesians 3:1-12). When God is

finished with this dispensation in which He is dealing with the Gentiles through His grace, He will resume His work with and through Israel as prophesied (Romans 11:26-31).[14]

As mentioned earlier, it is significant that our Lord was revealed as the Messiah first to men of Judea and then later to the Samaritan woman. Scripture says that Jesus came only to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*[15] (Matthew 15:24; John 1:11) and, in His initial command to His disciples, He told them to not proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to the Gentiles or to go into any city of the Samaritans to proclaim the gospel (Matthew 10:5-7). Prior to His ascension, He gave His disciples the order in which the gospel was to be proclaimed (Acts 1:7-8): to Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, and then the rest of the world (i.e., the Gentiles).

As briefly addressed in Chapters 5 and 8, this order is significant because the nations of the earth will one day be blessed through Christ and the descendants of Abraham (the nation of Israel) in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18; Galatians 3:16). After Solomon's reign, because of his sin against God, Israel was split by God into two kingdoms that became known as Judah and Israel (equivalent to Judea and Samaria in the New Testament). Judah consisted of the tribe of Judah (later joined by the tribe of Benjamin) and worshiped God in His designated capital of Jerusalem where His temple was located. Israel, also called Samaria in the Old Testament (I Kings 13:32; 21:1, 18), consisted of the other tribes and worshiped *God* and their idols in their own capital city of Samaria. The nation was split and remained so at the time that Jesus came to earth to minister to His people in Jerusalem and Judea.

In accordance with prophecy, God will restore the twelve tribes of Israel into one nation again (Ezekiel 37:11-23). It will be done first through the salvation of Jerusalem, then Judea, and then Samaria as revealed by our Lord in His instructions to His disciples. I believe this explains the significance of our Lord revealing Himself first to people of Judea and then to the Samaritan woman. She (representing the kingdom of Samaria) was expecting the Messiah because the people of Samaria were also Jews and were looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I believe that it is important to note that Jesus did not go to the Samaritan woman in her city to preach the gospel of the kingdom, which would have been against His own command, but that God brought her to Jesus (John 4:7-30). As a foretaste of God's prophetic plan for the reuniting of Israel, many more Samaritans in that city subsequently believed that Jesus was the Christ—the Savior of the world (John 4:39-42).[16]

The record in the book of Acts verifies that Jerusalem never repented, so Israel still awaits its restoration, deliverance, and kingdom. Contrary to prevalent Christian teaching, no prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel have been fulfilled since the early Acts period. This includes the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The State of Israel is a political nation that bears no resemblance to the prophetic kingdom and is no different than any other nation in this dispensation of grace. God's prophetic plan for His people of Israel will resume sometime after the rapture and all associated prophecies will be fulfilled to the letter.

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[14] See Chapter 4 and my studies **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** in Appendix C, **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ**, and **The Law of Moses** that explain the setting aside of Israel, the establishment of this dispensation of the grace of God, and the resumption of God's prophetic plan after the rapture.

[15] At that time the house of Israel consisted of Judea and its capital Jerusalem. The people had been led astray by the self-righteous chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

[16] *After* His conversation with the woman, the Samaritans asked Jesus to come into the city, and many believed what He told them. In this case Jesus was not breaking His own commandment because God was already working in these Samaritans to believe the truth. Please note that the disciples initially went into the Samaritan city to obtain food—not to preach the gospel of the kingdom (John 4:8, 27).

Our Savior

This brings us back to the question whether we are to know and follow Jesus as the man who walked among His people and came to be their Messiah and King, or to know and follow our glorified Lord who died for our sins, was buried, and was resurrected for our salvation and justification (Romans 4:23-25; 5:6-11). Please consider the following passage from Paul to the believers in Corinth.

> **For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died** [were dead—*Ephesians 2:1-3*]**; and He died for all, so that they who live** [*believers*] **might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we** [*believers*] **recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.** (II Corinthians 5:14-16)

What does it mean that although we have known Christ according to the flesh that we no longer know Him in this way? I believe this in an important point that is not recognized by most believers today. Brethren, we know that Jesus was born to Mary as a Jew, grew up and became a man, preached the gospel of the kingdom, healed all kinds of sickness and even raised the dead, was tortured and put to death on a cross, was raised from the dead by God, and then walked again as a man with His disciples for another forty days before ascending into heaven. These are all glorious truths that we can praise God for, but is this how we are to *know* Him?

When Jesus was born, lived, and died as a man, He was in a position of humility. That is, He gave up His glorious position with God in the heavens to become a man for our benefit. He not only experienced life as we do but also was tempted by Satan himself to worship and serve him (Matthew 4:1-11). However, upon His ascension our Lord was glorified by God and returned to His rightful position with God (Ephesians 1:18-23). It is from this position of glory that our Lord Jesus Christ is working for and through us today. It is in this exalted position that we are to recognize and know our Lord.

> **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped** [*asserted or retained*]**, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Philippians 2:5-11)

Not only did Christ humble Himself by becoming a man, He became a curse for us and our sin by dying on the cross (Galatians 3:10-14). Is the above passage saying that every knee will bow to Jesus in worship of Him? I do not believe that this is what it says or means. It is true that when Christ is King of kings during His millennial kingdom, the Gentile kings of the earth (all of whom will be nonbelievers) will go to new Jerusalem and pay homage to Him as their ruler—in a sense they will bow down to Him in some manner of respect but not so as to worship Him (Revelation 21:24; see also Matthew 2:1-12). Brethren, we are not to worship Jesus but, instead, we are to worship God in *the name* of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3-6; 5:20; Romans 15:5-6), just as we are to do all things for God in the name of our Lord (Colossians 3:17).[17] Because of what Christ

[17] See my study **Who Do We Worship?** in Appendix B that demonstrates that we are to worship God the Father and not our Lord Jesus Christ.

accomplished for us at the cross, He is our mediator and enables us to worship God through Him (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Furthermore, verse 10 of this passage says that at the *name of Jesus* every knee will bow. Because we are no longer to know our Lord as the man of flesh but as our glorified Lord, I believe the intent of this verse is that all will bow down to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as supported by verses 5 and 11 of this passage and in the context of the letter to the Philippians (Philippians 1:1-3, 9-11; 4:19-20; see also I Corinthians 1:2-4, 10; 6:11; Ephesians 1:15-23).

Brethren, this is important. We are often taught to follow Jesus, and the context of that admonition usually is to follow Him and His teachings as He was as a man as recorded in the books of Matthew through John. Jesus came to earth as a Jew to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—He came as their promised Messiah. Even though He was rejected by His people and crucified, He will return as Israel's Messiah at the end of the tribulation judgments and establish His heavenly kingdom on earth (Daniel 7:23-27; Revelation 19:11-16; 21:1-27). He was born under the Law of Moses and instructed His disciples to obey it (Galatians 4:4-5; Matthew 5:17-19; 23:1-3). He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead, and He promised His disciples that they would do those things and more (John 14:12-14).

As already demonstrated in this chapter and in Chapter 4, Jesus commanded His twelve disciples to teach repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins. They were to begin their ministry with Jerusalem and Judea, and when they were saved, they were to proceed on to Samaria (thus covering all of Israel) and then the Gentile nations. The gospel they were to teach was that Israel's long-promised kingdom was imminent. As they did so, they were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons, and were not to take any money, extra clothing, or other provisions with them for they would be provided for where they went (Matthew 10:8-10; see also Matthew 6:19-33). To obediently follow Jesus, they, and all disciples, were to sell all their possessions so that all of them would have all things in common and not be in any need (Luke 12:22-34; Mark 10:17-21; Acts 2:43-45; 4:32-35).

Please think about these things. Does God expect us to follow our Lord in all these things in accordance with the commandments of Jesus as He ministered in humble form as a man to His people of Israel? Some denominations, independent churches, and Bible teachers teach repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins, but this is not how we are saved today and is not the command we are to obey or teach. Every believer in this dispensation of the grace of God is saved because he or she believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead—we are saved by grace through faith apart from any works of righteousness including water baptism.

Furthermore, even though some falsely claim to miraculously heal the sick and cast out demons, no one is raising anyone from the dead. We are not to be ready or willing to sell all our possessions as I was taught but actually sell them as Jesus commanded His followers to do. Regarding our Lord's commandments to His disciples listed above, no one is obeying any of them. Nor should we even try. Instead, we are to know Christ as our glorified Lord and follow Paul as he followed Christ as explained in Chapter 8.

> **I** [*Paul*] **do not write these things to shame you** [*believers*]**, but to admonish** [warn] **you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort** [*urge*] **you, be imitators** [followers] **of me.** (I Corinthians 4:14-16)

> **Be imitators** [followers] **of me, just as I also am of Christ.** (I Corinthians 11:1)

Please also consider that we are not really disciples—followers—of Christ. We cannot follow Him on a daily basis in the same way that the disciples physically followed Jesus during His ministry (Acts 1:21-22), nor do the things that He commanded (and empowered) them to do. Because of what He accomplished for us at the cross, we have an even greater position. We are in Christ and He is in us—we are members of His body (Romans 8:1, 9-10; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). Our spiritual position this very moment is in Christ at the right hand of God—our citizenship is in the heavens (Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20-21). The disciples at the time of our Lord's ministry on earth were not given these promises. They were to look to the future when they would be on earth in their promised kingdom. His twelve disciples were promised to serve with Christ the King, sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Brethren, these are not our promises or hope. We are to know our Lord as our glorified and personal Savior and not as our Messiah.

Christ as King

Along with Messiah, we are often taught that Jesus or Christ is our King. It is not uncommon that Christians identify themselves as *children of the King* and consider Jesus to be the King of kings today. However, just as Christ is not our Messiah in this dispensation of grace, neither is He our King.

In veiled words, Christ was prophesied to be the king of Israel (Isaiah 9:6-7; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Micah 5:2). Israel was expecting a king to rescue them from the nations and lead them (Luke 1:67-79). God used the magi to announce the presence of the prophesied king,[18] and King Herod of Judea knew that the Prophets had spoken of *the Christ*, meaning that Herod knew that the prophesied king was the same as the prophesied Messiah.

> **Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship** [*pay homage to*] **Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah** [*the* Christ] **was to be born.** (Matthew 2:1-4)

Jesus' disciples recognized Him as their King (John 1:49; Luke 19:37-38), and He acknowledged to Roman Governor Pontius Pilate that He was, indeed, the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:11; John 19:19-22). Although He came as King, He did not fulfill His prophesied role as King of the Jews because His people rejected Him (according to God's eternal plan—Acts 2:22-23). However, when God establishes Israel's prophetic kingdom, Christ will not only be the King of the Jews but the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:11-16).

Brethren, our glorified Lord Jesus Christ is not the King of the Jews nor the King of kings today. Paul never referred to Him as our King or instructed believers to look forward to the prophesied kingdom. Our position is in Christ at the right hand of God in the heavens. We are members of His body, and He is the head of it (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:14-16; Colossians 1:18).

But did not Paul say that Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords? The following passage in his first letter to Timothy is often used as proof that he did so. However, please read it carefully. Paul was not referring to Christ but to God the Father, who has always been and always will be King of kings and Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 47:2; 95:3; 145:1; Daniel 4:37). It is God the Father who is the only Sovereign who dwells in unapproachable light and whom no man has seen or can see (Psalm 104:1-2; John 1:18; 6:46; Colossians 1:15; I John 4:12).

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[18] The visit by the magi was prophetic. During the millennial kingdom, Gentile kings from the nations outside of new Jerusalem will enter the city to pay homage to Christ, the King of kings (Revelation 21:22-24).

I [*Paul*] **charge you** [*Timothy*] **in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He** [*God*] **will bring about at the proper time—He** [*God*] **who is the blessed and only Sovereign** [Potentate]**, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him** [*God*] **be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.** (I Timothy 6:13-16)

Is Christ Our Messiah and King?

I was taught that *Messiah* means *Savior*; therefore, Jesus (or Christ) is our Messiah. However, we have seen that Messiah means *anointed*. As the anointed of God, one of the roles of the Messiah will be to save (deliver) the nation of Israel from its enemies. Another role will be to completely and permanently cleanse His people Israel of their sin (Ezekiel 36:22-28), which will be a process that will include severe judgment (Acts 3:23; Zechariah 13:7-9). Furthermore, another role will be as their King. However, we know our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior who died for our sins, was buried, was resurrected from the dead, and who ascended into heaven to return to the right hand of God. Our salvation is by faith (believing) in His work at the cross for us, regardless if we are Jews or Gentiles (I Corinthians 12:12-13; 15:1-4; Romans 10:8-13). None of the prophecies about the Messiah included this work of personal salvation either for the Jews or the Gentiles. Brethren, it is not correct to use Scripture to say that Christ is *our* Messiah.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth as Israel's promised Messiah and King. Israel rejected Him, however, and He is not our—nor anyone's—Messiah or King today. The prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament, and as confirmed and elaborated upon in the New Testament, were specifically directed to the nation of Israel. God will fulfill all His promises to Israel in due time. However, now is not the time because we are living in the dispensation of the grace of God. God is not working out His prophetic plan through the State of Israel today (or any other nation) but is accomplishing His eternal plan through individuals who believe in the saving work that Christ accomplished for us at the cross.

Believing that Jesus is our Messiah and King is a roadblock to our walk as members of the body of Christ—it is a tradition of men. It shows that we do not understand that God has blinded Israel and set that nation and its promises aside until He has completed His work in this dispensation of His grace according to His eternal plan (Romans 11:25-32). Furthermore, if we believe that Jesus is our Messiah and King, we must put ourselves back under the Law of Moses, just as the Galatian brethren were reprimanded for doing.

Brethren, God wants us to know and obey our glorified Lord Jesus Christ—as revealed to us through Paul—who is at the right hand of God in the heavens and who is the head of the church, which is His body (II Corinthians 5:14-21). If we believe the gospel of our salvation, we are members of the body of Christ. As members of His body—and as children of God (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26)—we should walk worthy of, or as befitting, our salvation in Christ. To know how God expects us to live each day, we need to know and obey His commands (through revelations of Jesus Christ) in Paul's letters.

The Sermon on the Mount

An acquaintance of mine, who was training to work in home missions (in contrast to foreign missions), told me that the most important passage in the Bible is what we call *the sermon on the mount* (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29) and that it provides everything a Christian needs to know to serve Christ. He stated it with certainty and was not seeking a discussion on the matter. Therefore, I did not ask him if he obeyed, or believed he should or could obey, the following commands from that discourse:

- Obey the Law of Moses in its entirety (Matthew 5:17-20).
- Reconcile with your brother before presenting your offering at the altar (Matthew 5:21-24).
- If your eye or hand causes you to sin (e.g., because of lust), cut it off (Matthew 5:27-30).
- God will forgive you only if you forgive those who sin against you (Matthew 6:14-15).
- God will give you or do whatever you ask of Him (Matthew 7:7-11).

Brethren, we cannot obey or claim these commands and promises because they do not apply to us in this dispensation of grace. We do not have the prerogative to pick and choose which commands to obey and which ones to ignore or change. If God intended for us to obey the sermon on the mount, then we would need to obey it in its entirety just as Israel was to obey the Law in its entirety.

Jesus' teaching was directed specifically to the twelve disciples, but it was also for the benefit of the Jewish crowd that heard Him (Matthew 5:1-2; 7:28-29). Furthermore, His teaching applied to Israel's future kingdom and not to members of the body of Christ, which did not exist until Paul was saved. After the rapture, those who become saved by believing the gospel of the kingdom and being baptized for the remission of their sins will obey *all* the commands to the letter because they will be sinless and will be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-27; Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:16-18). This will distinguish them from everyone else who is not saved. Please read the following prophetic passage carefully, and I hope you will see that it does not apply to believers today in this dispensation of God's grace because we continue to sin.

> **Everyone who practices** [committeth] **sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness** [the transgression of the law *of Moses*]**. You know that He** [*Christ*] **appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children** [*kingdom believers*]**, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil** [*Satan*]**; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.** (I John 3:4-10)

The above commands demonstrate that we are not to (and cannot) obey the sermon on the mount. We are not to change or disregard them; they are completely true but not meant for us. The commands and exhortations regarding how we are to conduct our lives (walk worthy) in accordance with our salvation in Christ are provided in Paul's letters.

Many of the commands regarding our walk as revealed to us through Paul, however, correspond with statements in the sermon on the mount because they are general truths of God that we see throughout Scripture. Consequently, I have referenced verses from the sermon on the mount to support statements in Paul's letters. This is an example of the truth that all Scripture is for us but not all of it is directly to us. We must rightly divide the word of God so that we do not try to obey commands, or claim promises, that do not apply to us in this dispensation of grace (II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17). Otherwise, we will find ourselves following the traditions of men instead of being obedient to God.

Prayer

Prayer is an important part of our walk as believers as I briefly presented in Chapter 7. But I just said that the promise in Matthew 7:7-11 from the sermon on the mount cannot be obeyed in this dispensation of grace. I will go even further and say that we are not to repeat the so-called *Lord's prayer* in Matthew 6:9-13 that was

also part of Jesus' sermon. How can I say these things when most Christian denominations and churches claim this prayer promise and regularly recite the Lord's prayer?

Many years ago, during a Bible conference, I spoke on the purpose and manner of prayer, including to whom we are to pray. As was my custom I tried to avoid preaching at the audience and presented my subject as I would in a Bible study, the only difference being that it was not an occasion for discussion. I read and referred to as many Bible references as practical within my allotted hour to explain my reasoning. Afterward, an acquaintance of mine, with whom I had fellowshipped for many years, came up to me and firmly told me not to tell him how to pray; then he walked away. He was not seeking a response, and I did not provide one. I could not help but wonder what passages we read that he chose not to believe.

I believe that prayer is very much misunderstood and often misused by my fellow brethren. We have developed our own traditions regarding prayer as we try to obey our Lord's commands regarding prayer to His disciples as recorded in the books Matthew through John. God used my own misunderstanding of prayer to begin opening my eyes to the truths of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God. As I attempt to demonstrate how our concept of prayer is often contrary to the will of God, please recall the many differences between prophecy versus the mystery and the commands and promises of the gospel of the kingdom versus the gospel of the grace of God.

Kingdom Prayer Promises

Although I have no memories of seeing the following promises put into action by the brethren with whom I fellowshipped, I was taught that we should claim them because they are promises to us. When I was 18 years old and experiencing a time of physical need, I decided it was time to put into practice my faith and rely on the promises, and I sincerely and fully expected to have my prayers answered accordingly.[19]

> **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil** [*of sin*]**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"** (Matthew 7:7-11; see also Luke 11:9-13)
>
> **"Again I** [*Jesus*] **say to you** [*disciples*]**, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst."** (Matthew 18:19-20)
>
> **And Jesus answered and said to them** [*the disciples*]**, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to the mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."** (Matthew 21:21-22; see also Mark 11:20-24)
>
> **"Truly, truly, I** [*Jesus*] **say to you** [*disciples*]**, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you** [*disciples*] **ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."** (John 14:12-14)

[19] This particular instance is described in my article **Testimony of Grace** listed in Appendix A.

"If you [*disciples*] **abide in Me** [*Jesus*]**, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."** (John 15:7-8)

"You [*disciples*] **did not choose Me** [Jesus] **but I chose you, and appointed** [ordained] **you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you."** (John 15:16)

Do you believe these promises? I absolutely do. Do they apply in this dispensation of grace? Absolutely not, as I discovered later. When I tried to point out to my pastor why these promises do not apply to us as members of the body of Christ, he reprimanded me. When I did the same for a friend of mine, he rejected my explanation and judgmentally said that if he prayed to God to move a mountain (he mentioned a specific local mountain) that He absolutely would do it, but that he did not see the point in even asking such a thing.

There always seemed to be a caveat, however. We were taught that if we did not get what we asked for, then there was a good reason for it. Perhaps God said "No" because we had some unconfessed sin, or perhaps God was telling us to "Wait" and that He would fulfill it later. Or, perhaps, our request was not in accordance with God's will. These are all convenient explanations, but where in the above passages are they given to explain why God might not give us what we pray for?

But what about Matthew 21:21-22? Maybe God does not give us what we ask for because of our lack of faith. Personally, I not only believed that God could heal me but that He absolutely would do so—I had no doubt. The problem was that I was misappropriating a promise that did not apply to me or to anyone today.

To Whom Do We Pray?

Hopefully all believers understand that we are not to pray to manmade idols, angels, dead *saints*, ancestors, earthly things (Mother Earth, Father Sky, animals, mountains, etc.), or the universe. Such prayers are fruitless and contrary to God and His will. However, there are uncertainties among the brethren concerning whether we should pray to God or Jesus or both. Does it matter? What does Scripture say?

The book of Psalms is full of the meditations, prayers, and praise of David toward the Lord God. He was not aware that there was a Son of God or that his salvation was sealed through the future redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. David knew God and prayed to Him.

When our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He instructed His disciples to pray to "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). Of course, when Jesus prayed for His disciples, He prayed to His Father (John 17). What greater example can we have than that of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Did the path of communication change after the death and resurrection of Christ? It is a glorious truth that He is our intercessor and mediator between us and God the Father (Romans 8:34; I Timothy 2:5). We are in Christ and all that we have is because of what He did for us at the cross. However, this does not mean we can or should pray to Jesus. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for us (Romans 8:26-27), but we are never instructed to pray to Him.

Paul was called to be the apostle of the Gentiles by the will of God to proclaim the gospel of His grace. His message was centered on Jesus Christ and all that was accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection. However, Paul did not pray to Christ—he prayed to God the Father and was able to do so because of Christ's intercessory work for us. *Every* example of Paul's prayers and what he prayed for indicate that his prayers were to God the Father (e.g., Romans 1:8-10; Ephesians 1:15-21; 3:14-21; Colossians 1:3; 3:17). Brethren, it matters to God that we pray to Him and only Him.

I [*Paul*] **thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation** [fellowship] **in the gospel from the first day until now.** (Philippians 1:3-5)

What Does Prayer Do?

Does God answer prayer? If so, how? Does He answer prayer with a "Yes," "No," or "Wait"? Do our prayers change what God was planning to do or allow?

As we have just seen, the disciples were given the promise that anything they asked in the name of Jesus, believing, they would receive. This promise was part of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to Israel and prophetically applied to believers controlled by the Holy Spirit (John 20:22-23; Acts 2:1-4; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Prayers would be granted or fulfilled as requested because they would be according to the will of God. Please let me explain.

I have already addressed sign gifts, and I encourage you to read through that section again with *answered* prayer in mind. At Pentecost, the apostles and disciples received the gift of knowledge along with the other sign gifts—tongues, healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, etc.—when the Holy Spirit descended upon them in power. Therefore, for a time, they thought, prayed, and acted according to the will of God in accordance with His prophetic plan. As mentioned regarding *the great commission*, this gift of knowledge enabled the apostles to know whose sins they could retain and whose sins they could remit—no one has that ability today. This gift of knowledge also enabled Peter to know that Ananias and Sapphira were lying, which led to their instant deaths as punishment by God (Acts 5:1-11). Brethren, when the apostles requested something of God (through prayer or speaking in the name of Jesus), they did so according to His will and He always fulfilled their requests.

Also as previously noted, these sign gifts were withdrawn by God when the *completed* revelation of the gospel of His grace was committed to us through Paul, which did not occur until after the Acts period but did occur before the end of Paul's ministry. The withdrawal of these gifts was also related to the setting aside (blinding) of Israel by God according to the revelation of the mystery.

Does God promise to respond according to our requests? Not in this dispensation of grace. In fact, there is no indication that God *answers* our prayers. Because we still have an old sin nature, we do not know how to pray as we should. That is, we are unable to knowingly make a request in accordance with the will of God. Instead, we are promised that God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we ask or think. Perhaps an even greater and more personal promise we have is that the peace of God will guard our heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we [*believers*] **do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He** [*God*] **who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He** [*the Spirit*] **intercedes for the saints** [*believers*] **according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called** [*saved*] **according to His purpose.** (Romans 8:26-28)

Now to Him [*God*] **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church** [*the body of Christ—believers*] **and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

We are instructed to take our concerns (for ourselves and for others) to God in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6). Supplication means to ask for something humbly or earnestly, or to make an earnest request or petition. To make this humble request with thanksgiving acknowledges that God is sovereign and that He operates according to His will instead of our will (Ephesians 1:11; Philippians 2:13). Are we praying with humility, or are we exercising our own will?

If something turns out as requested, either very soon or at some later date, then one might consider in practical terms that God responded with a "Yes" or "Wait." However, this does not necessarily mean that when something turns out as we prayed that it is in accordance with the will of God. Nor does it mean that God *answered* our prayer. I realize this is contrary to common teaching, so we need to look into this a little further.

If something happens according to how we prayed, we are often quick to say, "God heard our prayers," "God answered our prayers," or "God is good." Think about this. What if it does not turn out as we prayed? Does this mean that God did not hear or answer our prayers or that God is not good? To avoid this dilemma, we are often quick to explain the lack of a hoped-for result by convincing ourselves that we did not pray hard enough or have enough people praying for or with us, or that some unconfessed sin was blocking our prayers. These explanations are not supported by Scripture. Furthermore, what are we implying when we think that God *answered* our prayer? Does that mean that we made God aware of something because we prayed and that He acted upon it according to our desires? Is this how prayer works?

Many people, whether children of God or not, claim answers to their prayers because they apparently received what they asked for. God makes no promises to even hear the prayer of a nonbeliever, although we know He hears the prayer of a person who humbly acknowledges his need for salvation and the saving work of Christ (the account of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-4 is an example[20]). Furthermore, many believers claim answers to prayers that are contrary to the will of God because their requests are motivated by selfishness or greed (e.g., "I won the lottery!"), or they are claiming promises not intended for members of the body of Christ (e.g., "I spoke in tongues!"). It is easy to forget that we can be fooled and controlled by our very powerful and deceiving sin nature (Romans 7:14-25), and that Satan is working around us disguised as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

If what we pray for does not turn out as we hoped (an apparent "No" as we see it), it does not necessarily mean we should not have prayed for it. Again, we are to take all our concerns to God in prayer even though we do not know how to pray as we should. If our desire is not fulfilled as we hoped, our response should be to praise God that He is working things out for our good and according to His will that is beyond our comprehension. He has promised us His peace when our request is made humbly and earnestly with thanksgiving. It should be comforting to us to be in such personal communication with God that we can see how He is working in our lives and in those around us.

How often have we earnestly prayed that a loved one, a friend, or even a stranger who we have a concern for be saved and have never known if it actually happened, or perhaps years later found out that the person

[20] I believe that God, through the sanctifying work of His Spirit, had already begun a good work in Cornelius that led to his salvation through the witness of Peter (II Thessalonians 2:13-14; Philippians 1:6). Otherwise, his prayers would have been in vain because no one seeks after God by their own will (Romans 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:1-3).

did become a child of God? When we pray, we must remember that God works things out according to His will and according to His time. We should not be discouraged if things do not go as we hoped and prayed, but we should continue in prayer and depend on God and His infinite grace with patience and joy.

Prayer in Action

Although the Corinthian believers may not have known the extent of the difficulties faced by Paul and his coworkers in Asia, where even death appeared imminent, they prayed for them. Paul and the others were delivered from the threat of death, and Paul thanked the Corinthians for their prayers (II Corinthians 1:8-11). The Corinthians were sharing in their affliction and could rejoice in their deliverance. Were Paul and his coworkers spared because of the Corinthians' prayers, or were their prayers in accordance with the will of God? I believe that it was the latter.

While Paul was in prison in Rome, he was thankful to the Philippian believers and knew he would be delivered through their prayers (Philippians 1:19). Certainly, the hope of the Philippians (and of Paul) was that Paul would be delivered from prison. However, he ended up being put to death. Were their prayers fruitless and was Paul's hope without merit? No, because Paul's imprisonment furthered the gospel of Christ, and Christ was magnified (exalted) whether in Paul's life or his death (Philippians 1:12-21). So, Paul was delivered, though not in the manner hoped and prayed for by the Philippians—he was delivered from suffering in prison to Christ Himself. Furthermore, he was comforted knowing that his fellow brethren were sharing in his afflictions—he truly felt a bond with them (Philippians 1:3-11).

Prayer and God's Will

Can we change God's will through prayer? In other words, can we impose our will on God and convince Him to do something He did not intend to do? Some people think so, or at least their actions imply they believe so. Some believe that if enough people pray for a specific thing to occur that it will happen. Others believe that if people are praying in a manner to keep God's attention for 24 hours a day without a break (a *prayer chain*) that He will surely hear the request and grant it as desired. When things turn out as hoped, or at least seem to, they often take credit for the answered prayer ("It happened because we prayed."). Brethren, God is not hard of hearing, nor does He need to be convinced to do anything. He works all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 40:13-14; 46:9-10). It does not seem hard for us to believe that God will fulfill all the prophecies recorded in Scripture just as He said, but why is it so hard for us to believe that God is working in our lives according to His will and for His good pleasure? If we think we can get God to do what we want, then who is greater—us or God?[21]

> **For I** [*Paul*] **am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 1:6)

> **So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out** [*walk worthy of*] **your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work** [do] **for His good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13)

How Does Prayer Work?

> **In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we** [*believers*] **do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He** [*God*] **who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He** [*the Spirit*] **intercedes for**

[21] See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** that examines God's sovereign will in all things.

the saints [*believers*] **according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called** [*saved*] **according to His purpose.** (Romans 8:26-28)

From God's perspective, the process of prayer is summarized in the above verses. In this short passage we are told the following things:

- The Holy Spirit helps our weakness or deficiencies.
- We do not know how to pray as we should, but God knows our heart.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes between us and God in His words and according to the will of God.
- God causes all things to work together for good for His children.

Our weakness comes from the fact that even as children of God we still have a sin nature. As we make our requests known to God in prayer, we do not know if they are in accordance with the will of God because of our sin. Also, because we are human and have a sin nature, we do not know God's language. Thankfully, however, God knows our true intentions and desires, and the Holy Spirit who indwells us interprets our prayers in God's unspeakable language and according to His will. In this way we are assured that God is working things out despite our weakness.

What Should We Pray For?

Even though we need to have the Holy Spirit interpret our prayers to God for us because we are unable to pray as we should, we have abundant guidance about what God wants us to pray for. Please consider the following instructions and examples. We should:

- Thank God for saving us and our fellow brethren (Colossians 1:12-14).
- Pray that others would be saved (Romans 10:1; I Timothy 2:1-4).
- Not be anxious for anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are to make our requests to God (Philippians 4:6).
- Give thanks to God for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:20; I Thessalonians 5:18).
- Receive all things with gratitude or thanksgiving to God (I Timothy 4:4-5).
- Remember our fellow believers in prayer and thank God for them (Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 1:3-5; Colossians 1:3-4; 4:12-13).
- Pray for those who minister to us that they would further the gospel and the glory of our Lord, take advantage of opportunities as they come, speak with boldness, endure difficulties, etc. (II Corinthians 1:8-11; Ephesians 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-4; I Thessalonians 5:25; II Thessalonians 3:1-2).
- Pray for our governing authorities so that we may live a quiet life in godliness and dignity (I Timothy 2:1-2).[22]

Is anything too big, or too small, to pray about? Remember Philippians 4:6—we are not to be anxious about anything; instead, we are to take everything to God in prayer. God is bigger and greater than we can imagine. He knows everything about us—what we are doing, our thoughts, and even the number of hairs on

[22] As demonstrated in Chapter 10, this passage does not mean that those in authority will be good to us if we pray for them. Instead, if we truly recognize that they are in authority by the will of God (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17; Proverbs 21:1) and pray for them as God desires us to do, then we will experience the peace of God and will be better equipped to live for Christ whether those in authority are good or bad.

our head (Psalms 139:1-6; Matthew 10:29-31). God knows our needs and provides for us (Philippians 4:19). In His power and grace, God is able to do far beyond what we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20-21). Therefore, we should go to God in prayer with any concern or unselfish desire we have.

How Should We Pray?

As presented above, we do not know how to pray as we should; however, Scripture has provided many guidelines for us as we communicate with Almighty God. For example, we are instructed to pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17), as addressed in Chapter 7, which is to continue or be devoted in prayer (Romans 12:12), and are given an example of devotion to prayer night and day (I Thessalonians 3:9-10). Additionally, as we pray, we are to do so with alertness and thanksgiving (Colossians 4:2).

Our Lord taught His disciples the manner in which to pray and we should take heed to follow those instructions. Specifically, we should not pray to get the attention of those around us, we should not use vain or meaningless repetition, and we should understand that God knows our needs even before we ask Him. Before Jesus told His disciples the way they should pray, He first gave them the following warnings and instructions:

> **"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."** (Matthew 6:5-8)

Based on this passage, I have drawn the following conclusions and observations for your consideration:

- We are not to be hypocritical in our manner of prayer. We should make sure that when we pray that our devotion is to God and not to ourselves or to others. The intent of prayer is not to be seen or heard by people around us but to talk to God. If we pray in a public place, do we hope that the people around us notice that we are praying? If we pray with a group of believers, do we hope for or are we spurred on to greater words of wisdom by an "Amen" from one or more of the group? Think about how often prayer is used as a tool of preaching. Is the pastor or evangelist really talking to God or is he using prayer as a means for summarizing his sermon or calling the hearers to action? When we pray, are we truly talking to God with humility and devotion or are we being hypocrites by putting on a show for those around us?
- We are not to pray in a repetitive manner. Many religions promote repetitive prayer—repeating the same words or phrases in a particular situation or over a specified period of time. They think that by their many words they will be heard by God. This is contrary to God's will. Unfortunately, believers can fall into the same trap, as repetition of words and phrases is becoming more common in prayer and worship services. God is not deaf. He knows our thoughts. If we think we are more likely to get God's attention by saying (or singing) something over and over again we are fooling ourselves, belittling God, and being disobedient to Him. For this reason and others, we should not repeat *the Lord's prayer*.
- God knows what we need before we ask Him. Indeed, He provides for us beyond what we ask or think. If we realize that God is working in us according to His will and is working out all things for our good, then we should not be of the mind to try to convince God to do things according to our will when we pray. Praying in a hypocritical or repetitive manner in effect places our will above

God's will—prayer is being used to serve our purpose instead of His purpose. God wants us to take all our concerns and desires to Him in prayer with humility and thanksgiving, deferring to His will (as exemplified by our Lord prior to His crucifixion in Matthew 26:36-39).

I grew up reciting the *King James Version* of Matthew 6:9-13 as the *Lord's prayer* and want to provide a couple of thoughts on it for your consideration. That prayer was not Jesus' prayer to God; it would be more appropriate to refer to His prayer recorded in John 17 as *the Lord's prayer*. Jesus instructed His disciples to *not* be repetitious in their prayers (Matthew 6:7). Furthermore, if the specific words were meant to be repeated, then why are the words of this prayer different than what is recorded for us in Luke 11:1-4? Who decided that we should recite the version from Matthew 6, and do so according to the KJV?

> **"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**[23]**]'"** (Matthew 6:9-13)

> **It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John** [*the Baptist*] **also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father** [which art in heaven]**, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.** [Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.] **Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation** [but deliver us from evil]**.'"** (Luke 11:1-4)[24]

Although we should heed Matthew 6:7 and not repeat the *Lord's prayer*, the components of that prayer apply to any prayer. We see that we are to pray to God the Father, recognizing that He is the sovereign Almighty God and that He will accomplish His will in all things (Romans 8:26-28; Ephesians 1:11; Philippians 2:13). We should pray with thanksgiving, knowing that God will meet all our needs (Philippians 4:6; Ephesians 3:20). Furthermore, we should pray with humility, realizing the forgiveness we have through Christ and that we should be dependent upon God when facing temptations (Ephesians 4:32; I Corinthians 10:13). The specific words in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, however, apply directly to Israel and its kingdom promises and do not apply in this dispensation of grace (differences are addressed throughout this book). God did not intend for us to recite the *Lord's prayer,* and it is against His will for us to do so.

Paul referred to bowing his knees before the Father as he described to the Ephesian believers his prayer for them (Ephesians 3:14-21). Does this mean we should physically bow on our knees when we pray? Although Paul may have bowed on his knees at times when he prayed, it is unlikely he always did so as he prayed without ceasing whether night or day. We are to pray to the Almighty God with humility, devotion, and alertness. For some cultures, and perhaps for some people in any culture, a demonstration of humility or respect is to bow on one's knees. Even though God does not require us to bow before Him in prayer, He deserves our humility and respect, and bowing before Him as we pray may be just what we need to focus our full attention on Him (Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2). If we do so, however, it should not be done to be seen by others or as a righteous, or religious, duty (Matthew 6:5-6; Colossians 2:20-23). The main point is to be humble and respectful before God. We can do this whether we are kneeling, standing, sitting, or lying down.

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[23] This clause is in the KJV but, according to my NASB column note, is not found in early manuscripts. Nor is it in the account in Luke 11:1-4 in either version. I defer to the NASB translators.

[24] The added phrases from the KJV were not in the manuscripts used by the NASB translators. I am in no position to comment on these differences.

Because we can pray to God anytime or anywhere, there are many situations where bowing on our knees is inappropriate or impossible.

Most churches hold prayer meetings, and some organize prayer chains. Prayer meetings can be a valuable time of fellowship where believers are of one mind while they pray for the needs of others. Paul and his coworkers apparently prayed together at times (Colossians 1:3, 9). However, we must be careful that a prayer meeting is not used as a means to be seen or heard by others, as a forum for preaching through prayer, or as a source for gossip or rumors. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of a prayer chain is misguided and inadvertently uses prayer as a tool for our own will. If a group of believers truly has a burden for a person or situation, then it is a good thing that they share in it through prayer as long as it is without the unscriptural constraints as to who prays when and for what.

Writing down our thoughts and desires can be a good form of worship—it can be a good means of setting our minds on God and depending on Him. But what about reciting written prayers? If writing out a prayer is done to make sure we get the words right, then we should reexamine our reason for praying. If we feel we need a prepared prayer to pray in a public setting, then maybe we should not be praying in that situation in the first place. Furthermore, is praying to God by reading a prayer written by someone else (e.g., from a book of prayers) something that He expects or desires from us? Prayer should be spontaneous and from the heart, with humility and sincerity. We need to remember that prayer is personal—it is between the individual and God (Matthew 6:5-8). We should talk to God, in our own words, in the same way we talk to anyone we love and respect. We will see what Paul prayed about, but we do not know the actual words that he prayed.

Paul's Prayers

On many occasions in his letters to his fellow believers, Paul referred to what or for whom he was praying. In these examples, Paul:

- Thanked God the Father for saving us by His grace through redemption in Christ (Colossians 1:12-14; II Thessalonians 2:13).
- Prayed for the salvation of his kinsmen—his fellow Jews (Romans 10:1-3).
- Thanked God for his fellow brethren for their faith in Christ and their love for Him and their fellow brethren (Romans 1:8-9; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-5; Colossians 1:3-4; I Thessalonians 1:2-3; II Thessalonians 1:3; Philemon 1:4-6).
- Prayed that he could visit the believers who he desired to see (Romans 1:10; I Thessalonians 3:9-11).
- Constantly remembered Timothy in his prayers day and night, longing to see him (II Timothy 1:3-4).
- Prayed that God would open the eyes of other brethren so that they would know God and the love of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, be strengthened with the power of God through His Holy Spirit, and walk worthy of their salvation so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in them and that they would be glorified in Him (Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Colossians 1:9-12; II Thessalonians 1:11-12).
- Prayed that Christ would dwell in the hearts of the brethren through faith and that they would be rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:14-17).
- Praised and glorified God for being able to do far more in us and through us than we could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20-21).
- Thanked God in all his remembrance of the Philippian believers (Philippians 1:3-4).

- Prayed that the brethren would abound in real knowledge and discernment to be sincere and blameless before God (Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-10).
- Thanked God that the Thessalonian believers received the message from him and his coworkers as the word of God and not as the word of men (I Thessalonians 2:13).

In these references to Paul's prayers, we see that he praised and glorified God, was thankful for all that God had done and was doing through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ for the brethren, and was thankful for the faith and love of his fellow saints. Paul was devoted to prayer, and his prayers were sincere and unselfish. Additionally, he was not afraid to tell the brethren that he was praying for them and for what purpose.

> **For this reason I bow my knees before the Father** [of our Lord Jesus Christ]**, from whom every family** [of whom the whole family] **in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He** [*God*] **would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints** [*believers*] **what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him** [*God*] **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him** [*God*] **be the glory in the church** [*the body of Christ—believers*] **and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Prayer Summarized

It is wonderful and a blessing to be a child of God. We have much to be thankful for. However, life can be very difficult at times for us and for our loved ones and friends. God wants us to take our concerns to Him in prayer. He wants us to remember our fellow brethren in prayer. Additionally, God wants us to pray to Him with humility and thanksgiving.

Think about it, brethren. When we are praying, we are communing with the Almighty God who created us through Christ. I am fully convinced that if we approach God with humility and thanksgiving, we become more aware of how He is working in our lives and in those around us—we are more in tune with His love and grace. Only God's own children can know and experience these amazing things.

There is no set formula or time for prayer. Whether standing or kneeling, whether day or night, we can and should talk to God in prayer. We are able to do so because of what Christ did for us at the cross. We have the Holy Spirit to interpret our desires in accordance with the will of God. We have God in all His grace and power working for us.

God has not promised to grant our requests. However, He has promised us His peace that passes all understanding, and He has promised to work all things out for our good. Furthermore, He has promised to meet our needs beyond all we could ask or think. Praise and thanks be to God and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

God has revealed to us the purpose of prayer and how we ought to pray. Brethren, we must diligently try to not pray in accordance with religious traditions or to please or impress others.

Other Traditions of Men

There are many more traditions of men that have governed our worship that are a distortion of, or contrary to, the word of God. As addressed in Chapter 12, I believe that the anti-abortion movement in the name of

God is a tradition of men. I could go into how such subjects as tithing (instead of giving as we are able from the heart), how we praise God (e.g., wanting to be seen or heard by others, Christian entertainment, etc.), and impressive church buildings (they are not houses of God), just to name a few, that are often misunderstood or misused to become false traditions. However, please consider the following prevalent teaching that I believe deserves attention here.

My experience is limited, but I am not aware of conservative or evangelical denominations or independent churches that do not teach that the earth and universe were created in six 24-hour days. It is often included in their statement of faith as a tenet of their church. This doctrine includes the teaching, therefore, that the earth must be about 6,000 years old, Adam was the first human being, and a great flood covered the entire globe thus providing all our geologic strata, landforms, and fossils. For many centuries, the Bible was used to prove that the earth is flat and is the center of the universe, and that the sun revolves around the earth. Brethren, I am certain that these teachings, past and present, do not stand the test of Scripture and are traditions of men.

I am not saying that the Bible is wrong. What I am saying is that we are not reading it correctly. Because of the false premise that the first chapter of Genesis explicitly refers to six 24-hour days, an entirely new *science* of creationism has been developed that has no basis in real science. I am saying this as a member of the body of Christ and as a person who also is a scientist—a geologist. I became a scientist not only after my salvation but after I began to understand the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God, and I do not have a conflict between my understanding of science and that of Scripture.

I recognize the natural laws of our creation—laws established by God as the Creator[25]—and know that creation science does not align with those laws. However, I believe that the word of God itself disproves the doctrine of creationism. My understanding of science in general and geology in particular enhances my appreciation of the handywork of God and leads me to give Him all the glory as I see and experience His magnificent and incredibly intricate creation.

Every culture has its own creation story that is supported by its own history and supposed evidence, and I believe Paul warned Timothy (and us) against such knowledge or false science. Christianity has created its own false science in creationism.

> **O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"** [oppositions of science falsely so called]**—which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.** (I Timothy 6:20-21)

I fully realize that I am making strong allegations here but consider all the other false teaching that I have already addressed in this chapter and book. Creationism is just another example of false teaching, and it is one that causes the nonbelieving world to blaspheme God (Romans 2:24). That is, they disregard, denigrate, or laugh at God because of our foolishness. I encourage you to read my studies **Creation—What Does Scripture Say?**, **Adam**, and **Noah** for nontraditional, yet scriptural, perspectives on these subjects.

Are We Obeying God?

I have addressed traditions of men regarding commonly held beliefs on the Ten Commandments, *the great commission*, water baptism, communion, sign gifts, Christ the Messiah and King, the sermon on the mount,

[25] I believe that Christ—God the Son—did the creation work according to the will of God our Father (Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:3).

and prayer in this chapter and elsewhere. These traditions are drawn from truths in Scripture but are misapplied in this dispensation of grace. I added my perspective on creationism, which is a false new science that tries but fails to convince a nonbelieving world that God is the Creator. Instead of merely accepting what we are taught, it is incumbent upon us to think about how we worship God and conduct ourselves as His children. Are we doing so in accordance with His word? Does the reason we are believing or doing something stand the test of Scripture?

Paul and his coworkers established the very first churches according to the gospel of the grace of God in this dispensation of His grace. And yet, in Paul's subsequent letters to those churches, we see warnings against adhering to traditions of men. This is because the churches were already being influenced by false teachers and some (the churches in Galatia) had already succumbed to their false teaching. All believers continue to sin, so by nature we are prone to wanting to believe and do things our way instead of God's way.

In my experience, unfortunately, I have found that much of Christianity today is not much different than the Galatian brethren who were deceived and convinced to justify themselves through their religious works, or the Corinthian brethren whose worship and walk were motivated, and corrupted, by their pride. So much has been added to or subtracted from Scripture that our teaching is difficult to distinguish from that of the scribes and Pharisees during Jesus' ministry. I pray that we would break the bonds of the traditions of men and conduct our lives in obedience to God and His word for His glory and honor. Doing so will help us walk worthy of our salvation in Christ.

Chapter 15

How is Our Walk?

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

So, are we *walking the walk* or just *talking the talk*? Actually, is our talk aligned with Scripture or is it just what we think we should do?

I prepared my study **Walk Worthy**, which is on our website, many years ago based on a series of lessons I taught to my Bible study group at the time. Since then, many of my lessons have focused on various aspects of our walk as believers and resulted in several other studies posted on the website. Most of those studies were triggered by questions and comments by members of my Bible study groups. A couple of years ago I decided to compile those studies into a book. During the preparation of this book, I found the need to add new information about our walk that I had never considered or adequately addressed in the past.

At the beginning of this book, I defined a worthy walk as living our lives in a manner that is befitting our salvation in Christ—we should live appropriately. To link a worthy walk with our salvation is not commonly taught. In fact, I never heard it expressed in that way. I was taught that Ephesians 4:1 referred to doing our best in whatever job or profession we had (which we should do—Colossians 3:17, 23), with work in the ministry being the highest calling. At a family Bible camp, I taught that our *calling* (*vocation* in the KJV) in this passage refers to our salvation—what God has done for us through Christ—instead of our job or ministry. Afterward, a good friend of mine, a man who had his own evangelical ministry, said he had never considered it that way but agreed that my understanding was the correct interpretation based on the context of the preceding chapters in the book of Ephesians. I hope I have adequately demonstrated this to be the case in this book and encourage you to investigate the referenced verses and passages provided in Chapter 3.

I fully realize that there are many things I presented in this book that are not according to traditional Christian teaching, regardless of our denominational or church background. That is why I typed out so many verses and passages, and referenced many more, to support my statements and conclusions. I leave it to you to look up and prayerfully read them to see for yourself what Scripture says. I encourage you to set aside traditional teaching and understanding and look at everything with fresh eyes.

Brethren, I truly believe that God, through His written word, provided us with all the instructions and tools we need to live each day in a worthy manner according to His will. Experience proves, however, that we are not very good listeners or doers. Our countless Christian denominations, independent churches, and organizations, which all differ on Bible doctrine and what they teach, testify to the fact that the Bible is very much misunderstood and misused. My goal in the first four chapters, therefore, was to set the foundation for who we are in Christ and how to understand God's will for us.

I cannot separate our walk from doctrine. How are we to live as God wants us to live if we do not have a solid understanding of what God has done for us through Christ and His work at the cross for us? When I first began to learn about the revelation of the mystery by our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ to Apostle Paul and its major theme—the gospel of the grace of God, my life was turned upside down in a very good way. I soon wanted to fellowship with those who had the same understanding and to share what I was learning to anyone who was interested, regardless of their religious background.

Please consider how God blessed us the moment we believed the gospel of salvation. As explained in Chapter 2, our blessings include (among other things) the forgiveness of our sins—we are no longer dead in sin but alive in Christ, our certain hope of eternal life, our adoption as children of God, our membership in the body of Christ—we are in Him and He is in us, and our justification, sanctification, and glorification through Christ's death and resurrection for us. Brethren, we are God's workmanship—a new creation. Our salvation is sealed by the Holy Spirit, and nothing can separate us from the love of God. All these blessings are by the grace of God—we do not deserve them. We did not and cannot earn any of them.

What should our response be to what God has done for us through Christ? Should we continue living our lives doing what seems right to us? Or should we obey God by walking worthy of our calling? In Chapters 5 through 10, I have tried to present what Scripture says about how we are expected to live. Only in the last few years did it dawn on me that love appears to be the cornerstone of our walk by the Holy Spirit in Christ. Although much of my teaching over the years has focused on our walk, prior to drafting this book I did not realize how many exhortations (commands) there are regarding our walk as believers, and I certainly did not cover them all. This has been a humbling experience.

I address our motivation for a worthy walk in Chapter 11, which could be summarized as doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Some of the consequences of doing the right thing, particularly facing persecution from both nonbelievers and fellow brethren and how God expects us to respond, are covered in Chapter 12. Roadblocks holding us back from a worthy walk, including our own sinfulness and reliance on false teaching or traditions, are presented as I understand them in Chapters 13 and 14. I have found that our pride, perhaps more than any other trait, prevents us from living as God has intended. Furthermore, I think that our pride diminishes our ability to love others as ourselves.

Brethren, the bar has been set very high. No one is perfect and all of us will continue to sin, but I firmly believe that every believer can walk worthy of our calling because we have the Holy Spirit within us. Paul admitted his own sinfulness, and yet I know that he walked in a manner befitting his salvation. Every person who believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead is a child of God. As children of God, we are ambassadors for (representatives of) Christ, and it should be our desire to live as good ambassadors. To do so means to live each day according to the will of God in a manner that brings honor and glory to God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe that Christ died for you? If so, and I hope you do, let us endeavor to walk in a manner worthy of our salvation in Christ.

Appendix A

Lists of Studies

This appendix lists the studies on the **Bible Studies** page at gospelofgracenotes.org as of the publishing date of this book. The website page lists them in the order they were originally posted, and their file names contain the date of their latest revision; some background on their development is provided in the introductory paragraphs. I hope to continue revising them as needed and adding new studies. For example, I have handwritten lesson notes on Bible book studies—Acts through II Peter—as well as other specific subjects that I have conducted over the decades (which helped me prepare for writing this book) that I would like to compile as time allows.

Some of the studies incorporate Bible study notes going back to the 1970s. My first of the listed articles, **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ**, was written in the early 1980s in response to a question from Linda's parents. I have edited it over the years, but it has not significantly changed since the first edition.

Although all the posted studies address the nature of God and His word and what He has done for us through Christ (God and our standing before Him) and what He expects of us as His children (our walk in Christ), the studies primarily focus on one or the other aspect and are grouped below accordingly. Many of the studies are summarized or referenced in the book. If a reader wanted to know my recommendation for which study to start with, I would suggest **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)**, which is provided in Appendix C.

God and Our Standing Before Him

Adam
Are We Really Christians?
Christ in the Law of Moses
Creation—What Does Scripture Say?
Good News!
Is Christ Our Messiah?
Noah
Our Lord Jesus Christ
Salvation and Its Blessings
Salvation and the Sovereignty of God
Satan and His Role
Should We Be Baptized?
Sovereignty of God: New Testament Verses
The Law of Moses
The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)
The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ
What's the Difference?
Which Gospel?
Who Do We Worship?

Our Walk in Christ

Abortion
Addiction (and Bad Habits)
Are Rewards Our Goal?
Christian Hypocrisy
Christian Suffering
Commands About Our Walk as Believers
Follow Paul
Fruit of the Spirit
Governing Authority
Humility: New Testament Verses
Let Us Be Humble
Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves
No Room for Racism
Not of This World
Our Way or God's Way
Prayer
Testimony of Grace
Walk Worthy
Why I Teach the Word of God

Appendix B

Who Do We Worship?

I grew up during the *Jesus Movement* of the late 1960s and 1970s when Jesus the man became the focus of worship, which continues to this day. Is our focus correct? I included this study from our website because I believe that it is important to know who we worship and how we are expected to worship Him as a foundation for understanding how to walk worthy of our salvation. I did not research other authors' works to reach my conclusions; instead, I searched the Scriptures using my Bibles and concordances. What does Scripture say?

Who Do We Worship?

Introduction

When the people of Israel were about to enter into the land that God had set aside for them after escaping Egypt (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; Exodus 6:8), God warned them to not worship the gods or follow the religious customs of the nations that Israel was to displace (Exodus 34:11-17). According to the laws and ordinances that God had given to His people through Moses (the Law of Moses), they were to devote themselves to the living Almighty God, who was the Creator and God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:13-16; 20:1-7). Unfortunately, Israel as a whole did not do this—they disobeyed God and, throughout their history, worshiped the gods of His enemies (Isaiah 65:1-7; Ezekiel 2:1-7; Acts 7:35-53).

Who or what does the nonbelieving world worship today? As from the beginning they worship everything under the sun, as well as the sun and the universe. Everything, that is, except the Almighty God. Although everyone is seeking something, such as the meaning of life, inner peace, fulfillment, purpose, a higher power, etc., in truth *no one* is seeking for God through whom we can realize all these desires and more. Through their endeavors they often find or create a god of their imagination—someone or something on which they bestow attributes similar to the Almighty God—who or which seemingly suits their needs and desires.

> **As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."** (Romans 3:10-12; see also Psalm 14:1-3)[1]

Why is it that no one seeks for the one true, living Almighty God? Because mankind chose to worship the creation rather than the Creator, God gave them over to their sin (Romans 1:18-32). Every one of us inherited that sinful condition. We are by nature separated from God and His righteousness—we are sinners and enemies of God (Romans 3:23; 5:6-11). In fact, God considers us to be dead in sin and deserving of His judgment—we are children of disobedience (Satan) and without hope (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12; John 8:41-47).

> **Professing to be wise, they** [*mankind*] **became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image** [*idol*] **in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie** [changed the truth of God into a lie]**, and worshiped and served the creature** [*created things*] **rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.** (Romans 1:22-25)

Because of Adam's sin, when he disobeyed a direct command of God (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6-7), we were condemned to spiritual death (Romans 5:12-14, 18-19). Left to ourselves, we are in a hopeless position because whatever we may seek or do in life will not bring us to God. All we have to look forward to, whether we realize it or not, is spiritual death—eternity in hell (Romans 6:20-23; II Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20:11-15).

Thankfully, God provided a remedy for our hopeless condition. He sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins (Romans 3:21-26; 5:10-11). Through the power of God that resurrected Jesus from the dead, God bestows eternal life to everyone who believes in that blessed work that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished at the cross

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[1] All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (*NASB Side-Column Reference Edition,* Copyright © 1996 by The Lockman Foundation). Nonbolded words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* (KJV) or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

(Romans 6:23; Ephesians 1:15-23). We do not need to do anything—in fact, we are not to do anything—other than to humbly believe the gospel (good news) of salvation.

What is the gospel of salvation? The gospel that we are to believe is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead. God requires *nothing* else—not repentance, water baptism,[2] church membership, or any other religious work. Do you believe that Christ died for your sins?

> **Now I** [*Paul*] **make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

> **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

When we believe this glorious gospel (truly believe it from the heart—Romans 10:8-10), we are acknowledging our sinfulness and our need for salvation. At the very moment of belief, we become children of God (Romans 8:14-17). Because we did not do anything to earn our salvation—it is a gift of God (Romans 4:4-5; 6:23)—we cannot lose our salvation. We are sealed by God's Holy Spirit; that is, we permanently belong to God, and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39).

> **In Him** [*Christ*]**, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

From the very beginning, actually from a time *before* God created the earth, God planned to provide salvation from sin through Christ (Ephesians 3:1-12; Romans 16:25-27; I Corinthians 2:6-8; Colossians 1:25-27). Among the many blessings of God we receive when we believe the blessed work at the cross accomplished by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we automatically become members of the body of Christ, which the Bible refers to as *the church* (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 1:22-23).[3] Through the working of God, we are in Christ and He is in us (Ephesians 2:4-6; Romans 8:1, 9-11; Colossians 1:27). This study is directed to members of the body of Christ, who I will also refer to as *believers*, *brethren*, and *children of God*.

Worship by Believers

Who are we to worship? One might think it is obvious. However, it apparently is not obvious to many brethren. For example, think about the following expressions or responses common among the brethren in words and songs:

- Do we express our praise by saying "Praise God" *or* "Praise Jesus"?
- Do we express our thankfulness by saying "Thank you, God" *or* "Thank you, Jesus"?
- Do we attribute something that we observe or understand as according to the will of God *or* according to the will of Jesus?

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[2] See my study **Should We Be Baptized?** that explains why God does not require water baptism in any form or manner for any reason now and also describes the *one baptism* spoken of by Apostle Paul that does apply to every believer today (Ephesians 4:4-6).

[3] See my study **Salvation and Its Blessings** that identifies many of the blessings we receive as a gift of God the moment we believe the gospel of salvation.

- Do we pray to God the Father *or* to Jesus *or* to both?
- Do we thank or glorify the Holy Spirit for a work we attribute to Him?

There seems to be uncertainty, or at least inconsistency, among brethren. Are we to focus our worship on God the Father, Jesus the Son of God, or both? Are we to worship God the Father, the Son, *and* the Holy Spirit? These appear to be important questions, but does it matter as long as we are worshiping *God*? What does Scripture say?

The Godhead

Scripture speaks of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three aspects or persons of God form a whole, which is often referred to by man as the *triune God* or the *Trinity* (accurate descriptions even though the words are not in the Bible). In Scripture, the triune nature of God is called the Godhead or the divine nature (Deity) of God, depending on the Bible version.

> **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."** (Matthew 28:19)
>
> **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.** (II Corinthians 13:14)
>
> **For in Him** [*Christ*] **all the fullness of Deity** [the Godhead] **dwells in bodily form.** (Colossians 2:9)
>
> **For since the creation of the world His** [*God's*] **invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature** [Godhead]**, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they** [*mankind*] **are without excuse.** (Romans 1:20)
>
> *(See also Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 4:4-6; I Peter 1:2)*

For some, this three-part character of our one God is easier to understand by examples in nature as part of God's creation. All chemical elements and compounds have three phases: solid, liquid, and gas. The occurrence of each phase is dependent on temperature, pressure, or a combination of both. For example, a molecule of two hydrogen atoms bonded with one oxygen atom is commonly known to exist in the form of ice (solid), as water (liquid), and as water vapor (gas). Regardless of its form (phase), it is still water. Even gold has three phases, with the gas phase occurring when it *perishes* (I Peter 1:7) at a specific (very high) temperature. Before examining Scripture to see who we are to worship, let us *briefly* look at how the three persons of God are described.

God the Father

> **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.** (Romans 11:33-36)

God the Father is referenced by many names and titles in Scripture. Although this list probably is not complete, He is called *God* (Genesis 1:1), *God Almighty* (Genesis 28:3; 43:14), *Lord Almighty* (II Corinthians 6:18), *Almighty* (Genesis 49:25), *Creator* (Romans 1:25), *Jehovah* (Exodus 6:3—KJV), *Father* (Matthew 6:9; I Corinthians 8:6), *Lord* (Exodus 3:2-4; Matthew 1:20; 11:25), *Lord God* (Genesis 2:4), *Lord Most High* (Psalm 47:2), *God of gods and Lord of lords* (Deuteronomy 10:17), *King* (Psalm 145:1; I Timothy 1:17), *King of kings*

and Lord of lords (I Timothy 6:15), *King of heaven* (Daniel 4:37), *King above all gods* (Psalm 95:3), *Sovereign* or *Potentate* (I Timothy 6:15), *Majesty* (Hebrews 1:3), *Savior* (Titus 3:4-5), and *Judge* (Hebrews 12:23).

God also calls Himself "the Almighty God" or "Almighty God" (Genesis 17:1; 35:11), "I AM" (Exodus 3:14), "the Lord" (Exodus 20:2), and "Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). He dwells in the heavens in unapproachable light and has not been seen, and cannot be seen, by any man (I Timothy 1:17; 6:13-16; Psalm 104:1-2). Many brethren also believe that God refers to Himself as the "Alpha and the Omega" (from Revelation 1:8), but we will investigate this further when discussing God the Son.

All these names may not be as straightforward as they seem. For example, the name *Jehovah* appears in the KJV four times (Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). The Hebrew word (*Yehovah* or *Yahveh*) is translated as *Lord* in all other uses in the KJV (more than 6,500 times). It is translated as *Lord* in most occurrences in the NASB, although it is sometimes translated as *God* (as it is in Isaiah 12:2 and 26:4); but never as *Jehovah*, however. It is not clear to me that all four verses in the KJV are referring to God the Father, or that one or more are referring to God the Son in veiled words. It is further possible that *Jehovah* refers to both God the Father and God the Son; *perhaps*, the name *Jehovah* was drawn from tradition and is not the best English translation of the Hebrew word.

Along this same line of thought, God said to Moses that His name is "I AM" in Exodus 3:14. Jesus also referred to Himself as "I am" in John 8:58. The question that comes to my mind is, "Who was talking to Moses?" Was it God the Father or God the Son? Or was it God the Father through God the Son? Could it have been the angel of the Lord speaking in his own voice (Acts 7:38)? I am not certain about the answer to the initial question, but I strongly suspect that it was God the Son who was personally communicating with Moses through the angel of the Lord because God the Father dwells in a place of unapproachable light and no one has heard His voice (I Timothy 6:13-16; John 5:37). This perspective is provided only as food for thought because Scripture is not definitive on this subject and I believe the answer does not alter how we are to worship God.[4]

One may wonder why I even consider the possibility that *Jehovah* could be referring to the Son of God or that it may have been Christ who was talking to Moses. Christ was prophesied throughout the Old Testament, including His death, burial, and resurrection, as He Himself revealed to His disciples (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). However, He was also active during the Old Testament times as revealed to us through Apostle Paul. I will address this in the next section.

When we read verses about the King and Savior, we need to be careful to examine the context. Although we might assume that those designations always refer to Jesus Christ, God the Father is also referenced as *King* and as *Savior*. God has always been, and always will be, King over everything (I Timothy 1:17; 6:13-16) and the Savior of all His children (Luke 1:46-47; I Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 3:4-7; Jude 1:25). It is God the Father who chose us and drew us to Himself for salvation (John 6:37, 44; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6; II Thessalonians 2:13-14).[5]

[4] See my study **Christ in the Law of Moses** that goes into greater depth on how God communicated with His people and how He does so today.

[5] See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** for more on this subject.

God the Son

> **In the beginning was the Word** [*Christ*]**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.** (John 1:1-4)

> **He** [*Christ*] **is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him** [*Christ*]**, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.** (Colossians 1:15-20)

Brethren, the triune nature of God is very complex, and I believe it is beyond our ability to fully comprehend it. For example, the above passages reveal to us that not only was the Son of God in the beginning with God, but He was God. Furthermore, He is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation. In a prophecy about His birth, a name of Jesus would be *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). Our Lord Jesus Christ was indeed God in the flesh when He walked on this earth (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-11). However, in the unfathomable ways of God, the Son of God has had, and will have, a different role in the Godhead than God the Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is also referred to by many names and titles in Scripture and, as for the names of God the Father, we must be careful to examine the context to determine whether it is God the Father or God the Son who is being referenced. In the New Testament He is referred to as *God* (John 1:1-2; Titus 2:13), *Jesus* (Matthew 3:13-17), *Christ* (Romans 5:6-8), *Jesus Christ* (and *Christ Jesus*—Romans 1:8; 3:24), *Lord* (Luke 2:11; I Corinthians 1:9), *Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1), *Beloved* (Ephesians 1:6), *Savior* (Titus 1:4; 3:6), *Messiah* (John 1:41; 4:25), *Immanuel* or *Emmanuel* (Matthew 1:23), *Son of God* (Matthew 14:33; Romans 1:4; II Corinthians 1:19), *Son of Man* (Matthew 12:40), *Son of David* (Matthew 15:22), *King* (Matthew 21:5), *King of the Jews* (Matthew 2:2), *King of Israel* (John 1:49), *King of kings and Lord of lords* (Revelation 17:14; 19:16), *Prince of life* (Acts 3:15), *Apostle and High Priest* (Hebrews 3:1), *Word* (John 1:1), *Word of God* (Revelation 19:13), *Lamb* (Revelation 17:14; 21:14), *Lamb of God* (John 1:29), *Shepherd* (Hebrews 13:20), *Rock* (I Corinthians 10:4), *Faithful and True* (Revelation 19:11), *Judge* (II Timothy 4:8), *the Alpha and the Omega* (Revelation 1:8; 22:13), *Amen* (Revelation 3:14), and perhaps other names. He is also addressed by several names in the Old Testament as will be shown below.

I would like to expand on a couple of these names. Besides being called *Christ*, He is also described as *the Christ* (Matthew 16:16, 20; 26:63; John 1:41; I John 2:22), referring to His position as the prophesied Messiah of Israel. Paul only spoke of Jesus as *the Christ* when trying to prove that fact from the prophetic Scriptures to unbelieving Jews (Acts 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 26:23). Except in Romans 9:1-5 where he referred to *the Christ* (NASB) according to the flesh for the sake of his Jewish kinsmen, Paul did not refer to Him as *the Christ* in his letters to members of the body of Christ (Romans through Philemon) because He is not the prophesied Messiah for us.[6] Rather, He is our personal Savior and head of the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23).

[6] See my study **Is Christ Our Messiah?** that supports this statement and the following paragraphs.

Now some thoughts to consider regarding the name *Messiah*. Because John 1:41 says *the Messiah* translates to *the Christ*, some Bible versions erroneously replace many or most references to *Christ* with *Christ the Messiah* (or just *Messiah*), or *Savior* with *Messiah*. However, as noted above, there is a different meaning between the anointed Redeemer or Savior (Messiah) of Israel and the Savior from our sins. Also, the Greek word for Messiah (*Messias*) occurs only twice in the New Testament (John 1:41; 4:25), whereas the Greek word for Savior (*soteer*) is always correctly translated as *Savior* in the KJV and NASB (occurs 24 times).

By dying for our sins and being raised from the dead by God the Father (Ephesians 1:18-21), Christ became our intermediary between us and God (I Timothy 2:5-6; Romans 8:34) and became our Savior (II Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 3:6). He is currently seated at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1), will call up the members of His body at *the rapture* (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; I Corinthians 15:51-52), and later will return to earth as the King of the Jews and reign as the King of kings and Lord of lords. At the close of His millennial kingdom, Christ will judge all the nonbelievers of all time at the great white throne and will turn His kingdom over to God the Father for eternity (Revelation 20:11-15; I Corinthians 15:23-28).[7]

Although not specifically called the Son of God in the Old Testament, He was active throughout that time. He was co-creator with God the Father (Genesis 1:26; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17) and accompanied Israel as it fled Egypt and sojourned in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:1-5; Exodus 13:21-22). As suggested earlier, He *may* have been the form of God (or His direct representative) who walked in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8) and who personally talked to specific men beginning with Adam (Genesis 2:16-17).

The Son of God was also prophesied as *Messiah the Prince* (Daniel 9:25-26), the Lord's *Anointed* (Psalm 2:2), *Savior* (as a deliverer or redeemer of Israel—Isaiah 19:20; 59:20), *Immanuel* (Isaiah 7:14), righteous *Branch* (Jeremiah 33:15), *David* (rather, the one who would sit on the throne of David—Ezekiel 37:24; see also Isaiah 9:7), and *King* (Psalm 2:6). Furthermore, He would be born, become the head of Israel's government, and be called *Wonderful Counselor* (or *Wonderful* and *Counselor*—KJV), *Mighty God*, *Eternal* (*Everlasting*—KJV) *Father*, and *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus was not called the names prophesied in Isaiah 9:6 during His time on earth; however, they will apply to Him when He rules from new Jerusalem during the 1,000-year messianic kingdom and perhaps after that (Isaiah 9:7).

As with the names of God the Father, there are a couple of names of God the Son that demonstrate our limitations in understanding the depth and almighty nature of God. In Isaiah 9:6 we see that Jesus Christ will be called *Mighty God* and *Eternal Father*. I admit my lack of understanding on these names for Him as they also apply to God the Father, but I refer to John 1:1 and other passages regarding the unity of the Godhead and believe it by faith. He most definitely will be God the Father's representative on earth as He rules over the His kingdom and the earth. I humbly conclude that it is not up to us to try to decipher all the complexities of our triune God.

> **"My Father, who has given them** [*His sheep*] **to Me** [*Jesus*]**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the** [my] **Father are one."** (John 10:29-30)

Now let us look at the name, or title, *the Alpha and the Omega* (simply *Alpha and Omega* in the KJV) that is recorded for us in Revelation 1:8. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and omega is the last letter. Therefore, the name can be translated to mean *the first and the last*, or *the beginning and the ending*. I agree with the explanation that this refers to the One so named as being eternal. The quote in Revelation 1:8 is often attributed to God the Father. But is it?

[7] See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** for more on these events and the associated Scripture references.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, [the beginning and the ending,]**" says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."** (Revelation 1:8)

Yes, it appears obvious that this verse was spoken by God the Father, because it is attributed to the Lord God who calls Himself *the Almighty*. However, let us examine this more closely, keeping in mind the triune nature of the Godhead and the Deity of Christ.

It is absolutely true that God is eternal (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 41:13; 90:1-2).[8] Many believers (perhaps most) think that the quotes in Revelation 1:8 are the words of God the Father describing Himself, perhaps as a parenthetical statement to close John's opening statement to the prophetic seven churches in Asia. However, the opening verse of the book of Revelation indicates that it was Christ who was revealing the word of God to John through the angel of God. I believe that subsequent passages in Revelation confirm that it was Christ who was speaking about Himself. He said that He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, and the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:17-18; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13). Christ was in the beginning with God the Father and is God (John 1:1-3).

Furthermore, when we think of God the Father, we think of Him as the Almighty God, which He is (I Chronicles 29:10-13; Psalm 91:1; II Corinthians 6:14-18; I Timothy 6:13-16; Revelation 11:15-17). However, the Son of God is also the Almighty God as just noted. This verse also says that the one who is speaking—Christ—is the Lord God, as God is often described in the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 2:4-9; 15:2; Exodus 23:17). I believe that it was Christ who was speaking through the angel of God to Moses, as He later did with John, as the Lord God (John 8:26-29; 12:49-50; Acts 7:38).[9]

There is another very important aspect of Jesus Christ that we must understand. As a man (God in the flesh—John 1:1-5, 14), Jesus ministered to His people Israel (specifically those of Judea—Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24) and spoke of their promised kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 23). Sometime after His ascension into heaven, Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Saul, who would later be known as Paul the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-16; Romans 11:13). The message that our Lord revealed to Paul, who was chosen by God and our Lord Jesus Christ to be our apostle (Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1), was different than that which He preached while on earth and commanded His disciples to preach.[10] Through Paul, we learn that although we know about Christ and His ministry as a man, we should now know and recognize Him as our resurrected, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-11).

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live [*believers*] **might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.** (II Corinthians 5:14-16)

Brethren, this is a very important point regarding how we view our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not to think of our Lord Jesus Christ as a man who walks with us and talks to us (as He did with His disciples)—He is seated in glory at the right hand of God in the heavens (Colossians 3:1-3; Ephesians 1:18-23). Considering this fact, is it proper for us to focus our worship on Jesus, such as praising Jesus, praying to Jesus, or claiming that Jesus told me to do this or that, etc.? I hope to provide the answer to this question from Scripture.

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[8] Isaiah 41:1-4 and Isaiah 44:6-8 appear to be talking about God the Father as the first and the last but may be prophecies about Christ.

[9] See my study **Christ in the Law of Moses** that examines Christ as being the Lord God who spoke to people.

[10] See my study **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ**.

God the Holy Spirit

> **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you** [*brethren*] **have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our** [*human*] **spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed** [*because*] **we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8:14-17)

> **In Him** [*Christ*], **you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge** [earnest] **of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own** [purchased] **possession, to the praise of His** [*God's*] **glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

The third person of our triune God is the Holy Spirit (also called the *Holy Ghost* in the KJV). He is referred to as the *Spirit* (Genesis 6:3; Mark 1:10; Romans 8:5), *Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 1:13), *Spirit of God* (Genesis 1:2; Matthew 3:16; Romans 8:9), *Spirit of the Lord* (Isaiah 11:2; Luke 4:18; Acts 8:39), *Spirit of Christ* or *Spirit of Jesus Christ* (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19), *Spirit of His Son* (Galatians 4:6), *Spirit of truth* (John 16:13-15), *Helper* or *Comforter* (John 14:16, 26), and perhaps more names.

The Holy Spirit is called the *Spirit*, *Spirit of God*, and *Spirit of the Lord* throughout the Old Testament. As we learn in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit has many roles including conveying the word of God to individuals in Old Testament times (I Samuel 19:20; II Samuel 23:1-2; Ezekiel 3:22-27), enabling us to believe the truth of God (I Corinthians 2:12-13), sanctifying us and sealing our salvation in Christ (II Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:13-14), spiritually baptizing us into the body of Christ at the moment we believe the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 12:12-13), and interpreting our prayers according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit dwells in all believers and gives us life through Christ (Romans 8:9-17). We are exhorted to live in a manner that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26), and to avoid doing things that grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:25-32).

Additionally, for a time, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples (and, later, Apostle Paul) to perform miraculous gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing, and raising the dead (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4, 43; 9:36-41; 19:11-13; 20:7-12). These gifts were a sign of God to prove to the people of Israel that the disciples and apostles were working in the name of God and of Christ (John 4:48; I Corinthians 1:22; II Corinthians 12:12). We know that the Corinthian believers also had some of the sign gifts for a while (I Corinthians 12:1-11), likely because there was a substantial number of Jews living in Corinth (Acts 18:1-8).

However, *all* the sign gifts passed away before the completion of Paul's ministry (I Corinthians 13:8-13) because Israel was temporarily, and to this day, set aside (blinded) by God due to its unbelief (Romans 11:25-32; Acts 13:44-47; 18:5-6; 28:23-29; Romans 10:1-3; II Corinthians 3:14-15). For example, toward the end of his ministry, Paul could no longer heal the sick (I Timothy 5:23; II Timothy 4:20), and he diminished the significance or usefulness of speaking in tongues well before that (I Corinthians 14:13-19).

In the future (sometime after the rapture), the disciples of Christ will again have the power of the Holy Spirit to perform the miraculous sign gifts, and God will put the Holy Spirit in the believing remnant of Israel to enable them to perfectly keep God's law and ordinances (Ezekiel 36:22-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34).[11] Brethren, despite what many believers, indeed entire denominations, believe and claim to be true, the Holy Spirit is not performing sign gifts through the children of God today.

[11] See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** that discusses the rapture and subsequent events.

Words Describing Our Worship

The people of God during the Old Testament times were not aware of God the Son—they only knew of God and the Spirit of God. Therefore, their focus of worship was to be on God (Exodus 20:1-7). Because the question of this study is about who we are to worship today, we will examine the New Testament, in which we become fully aware of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

To develop this study, the following words (and their forms) related to worship were investigated: *worship*, *praise*, *glory*, *bless*, *thank*, and *pray*. Most of these words are derived from multiple Greek words. Reference sources for this study consist of my personal copies of the following books:

- NASB and KJV Bible;
- *Comparative Study Bible: New International Version, Amplified Version, King James Version, and Updated New American Standard Bible* (Revised edition, Copyright © 1999 by Zondervan);
- *Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (James Strong, Abingdon Press, 1983);
- *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Robert L. Thomas, General Editor, Copyright © 1981 by The Lockman Foundation, Holman Bible Publishers); and
- *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (George V. Wigram, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002).

Greek words identified in this study are from *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, and their associated definitions are abbreviated from *Abingdon's Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. The reference numbers associated with each Greek word (enclosed in parentheses) correspond to both of these sources as well as the NASB concordance.

Representative verses and passages for each Greek word are provided in the next sections and are quoted from the NASB (see Footnote 1 on Page 1). The English translations of the Greek words are in bold italics. My intention is to show the different ways the words are used because it has been my experience that we rarely can rely on one verse to understand a specific doctrinal point. By investigating how a Greek word is translated, which may be with more than one English word, it shows the importance of reading and understanding the context in which the word is used.

I have never been a student of the ancient Greek language, so I am depending on the Bible translators of the KJV and NASB to have rendered the correct meaning of the Greek words into English. Although I have found a few discrepancies in both versions that I perceive as errors because of the context of a verse or passage, I have learned the meaning of the Greek words by how they were translated. Consequently, I am thankful to God for how He has used the translators to serve His purpose whether they realized it or not. It is remarkable to me how very close the KJV and NASB translations are, when accounting for the differences between old and modern English and considering they are nearly 400 years apart. To me, this demonstrates how God has preserved His word through the millennia (Psalm 12:6-7; 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; II Timothy 3:16-17).

Quite a few verses have one or more uses of the pronouns *He* and *Him* referring to a member of the Godhead (these pronouns are capitalized in the NASB but not in the KJV). To help clarify who is being referred to when it is not necessarily obvious, I have added the specific person of the Godhead in nonbolded italic font within brackets. I have diligently tried to make the correct insertion based on the context of the verse or passage but admit that every instance may not be correct and ask you to check it out for yourself.

When I insert the name "God," I am referring to God the Father. You will see that I insert both "Jesus" and "Christ" to clarify the pronouns *I*, *He*, and *Him* that are referring to the Son of God. My choice is not random but, hopefully, consistent as I will try to explain. Paul rarely referred to our Lord simply by the name of *Jesus*, and when he did so it was usually referencing what He did as a man such as fulfilling prophecy during His ministry to the Jews (His people) and by dying for us and being raised up (Romans 8:11; I Thessalonians 1:10; 4:14). However, he overwhelmingly referred to Him as *Lord*, *Jesus Christ*, *Christ Jesus*, *Lord Jesus*, and *Lord Jesus Christ* in his letters to members of the body of Christ (us), in recognition of all that He accomplished at the cross and in accordance with His position in heaven. We, too, should recognize the Son of God as our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1-7; II Corinthians 5:16-21).

Therefore, I inserted *Jesus* in brackets when the verse or passage is a quote by or is about our Lord when He was in the form of man, that is, from His birth until His ascension into heaven after His resurrection. I inserted *Christ* when the verse or passage is about what He accomplished for us at the cross and to recognize His current glorified position at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:5-11).

As you read the many verses and passages that are presented, as well as the referenced verses that are included within parentheses, not only consider who is being worshiped and in what manner, but who Jesus Himself worshiped. By doing so, I hope you will find the answer to the question, "Who do we worship?"

The Object of Our Worship

Who was Worshiped?

The following Greek words are translated as various forms of the word *worship* and similar words. The verses and passages demonstrate that *worship* has different meanings, depending on the context. For example, they describe our reverence to God (or gods) as someone or something we owe our existence to, as well as showing great respect, honor, or tribute—paying homage—to someone because of their title or position.

You will see that in Revelation 7:13-17 and 11:15-17, under the first two Greek words described below, that I am uncertain who the pronouns *He* and *Him* are referring to. I have inserted the name *Christ?* in these instances because I think they refer to Him. These passages pertain to the throne and who will be served. Because of the extensive symbolism in the book of Revelation, I sometimes find it difficult to discern between the throne of God in heaven and the throne from which Christ will be ruling over new Jerusalem and the nations during His millennial kingdom reign (Matthew 25:31-33).

In accordance with prophecy, Christ will reign forever (Ezekiel 37:24-28; Luke 1:32-33). However, in the context of the book of Revelation as I understand it, Christ will be sitting on the throne of God and representing God (Revelation 7:13-17; 22:1-5). Therefore, God will be reigning forever, also (Revelation 11:17; 21:1-7; 21:22-27). Consequently, the pronoun *He* in Revelation 11:15 might be referring to Christ or to God. Regardless, the 24 elders mentioned in Revelation 11:15-17 worshiped God (see also Revelation 4:1-11 and 19:4-5).

In Revelation 7:13-17 and 22:1-5, it appears to me that service will be rendered to Christ the Lamb of God who will be physically sitting on the throne of God in new Jerusalem, but that it is still God the Father who will be worshiped by His people during the millennial kingdom (see Revelation 7:9-12; 19:4-6). God the Father resides in unapproachable light, and no one has seen or can see Him (I Timothy 6:13-16). Therefore, I believe that only Christ will be present on the throne and not God the Father. I realize, however, that my under-

standing regarding the throne in the future kingdom is unclear. My uncertainty, however, does not affect my understanding regarding who I am to worship.

proskuneo (4352): to worship; to bow down in reverence (to pay homage)

This Greek word describes worship in the perspective of paying homage to someone. When translated as *worship*, it may be a holdover of the old English manner of greeting or honoring a king or other person of authority or high standing (royalty) with the salutation, "your worship." In such cases, the person was not being worshiped as a god or as their God. However, the British monarch was erroneously revered as the God-ordained representative or spokesperson of God (by *divine right*), historically beginning in the 1500s, and likely was worshiped by some constituents.

The following verses describe people who were paying homage, or rendering service, to Satan, Jesus, or God the Father. For example, the Gentile Magi did not go to Bethlehem to worship God or the Son of God, but to pay homage to the King of the Jews. They were a type (prophetic representative) of the kings of the nations who will go to new Jerusalem to give their due respect to Christ—the King of kings—during the millennium (Revelation 21:24; Psalm 72:8-11). Those future kings will not be going to worship Him as the Son of God or to worship God.

Even when the disciples *worshiped* Jesus, I believe they were paying homage to Him for who He was (the Son of God) and for the miracles He performed. After seeing their Lord ascend into heaven, the disciples worshiped Him and later were in the temple *praising God*.

Therefore, this Greek word as it stands alone does not give us a definitive answer as to which member or members of the Godhead we are to worship as God; the context of its use must be carefully considered. When all these passages are evaluated together, however, I believe that our worship is to be directed toward God the Father as demonstrated by Matthew 4:10, John 4:20-24, and Revelation 7:9-12, 11:15-17, 19:4-5, and 22:8-9.

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we [*the Magi*] **saw His star in the east and have come *to worship* Him."** (Matthew 2:2; see also Matthew 2:11)

Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You *shall worship* the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10)

And a leper came to Him [*Jesus*] **and *bowed down before*** [worshipped] **Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."** (Matthew 8:2; see also Matthew 9:18)

Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him [*Peter*]**, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat *worshiped* Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"** (Matthew 14:31-33)

But she [*a Canaanite woman*] **came and began *to bow down before*** [worshipped] **Him** [*Jesus*]**, saying, "Lord, help me!"** (Matthew 15:25)

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, *bowing down* [worshipping] **and making a request of Him.** (Matthew 20:20)

And they [*Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph*] **left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them** [*Mary and Mary*]

and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and *worshiped* Him. (Matthew 28:8-9)

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they *worshiped* Him; but some were doubtful. (Matthew 28:16-17)

While He [*Jesus*] **was blessing them, He parted from them** [*the disciples*] **and was carried up into heaven. And they, after *worshiping* Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.** (Luke 24:51-53)

"Our [*Samaritan*] **fathers *worshiped* in this mountain, and you people** [*the Jews of Judea*] **say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to *worship*." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you *worship* the Father. You *worship* what you do not know; we *worship* what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers *will worship* the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His *worshipers*. God is spirit, and those who *worship* Him must *worship* in spirit and truth."** (John 4:20-24)

Jesus heard that they [*the Pharisees*] **had put him** [*the healed blind man*] **out** [*of the synagogue*]**, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he *worshiped* Him.** (John 9:35-38)

After these things I [*John*] **looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb** [*Christ*]**, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and *worshiped* God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."** (Revelation 7:9-12; see also Revelation 5:11-14)

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord [*God*] **and of His Christ; and He** [*Christ?*] **will reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who sit on the thrones before God, fell on their faces and *worshiped* God, saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign."** (Revelation 11:15-17)

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and *worshiped* God who sits on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His [*God's*] **bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."** (Revelation 19:4-5; see also Revelation 14:6-7)

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to *worship* at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. *Worship* God." (Revelation 22:8-9; see also Revelation 19:9-10)

latrūo (3000): to minister; render religious homage; serve, do the service, worship

As observed in the following verses and passages, this Greek word refers to both worship and service, which sometimes describe two different actions. In nearly all uses, the Greek word refers to the service to, or worship of, God the Father. As mentioned earlier, however, the object of service is not always definitive to me in the book of Revelation.

It is true that believers are considered to be bondservants of both our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; II Timothy 2:24; Titus 1:1; James 1:1)—we were bought by God through the shed blood of Christ (I Corinthians 6:19-20; 7:23; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:21-26). Therefore, we are to serve both Christ and God the Father. However, I believe that the following verses, when considered together and with the other verses in this study, demonstrate that our worship is to be directed toward God the Father.

Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and *serve* Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10)

"The oath which He [*the Lord God of Israel—Luke 1:68*] **swore to Abraham our father, to grant us** [*Israel*] **that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might *serve* Him** [*God*] **without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."** (Luke 1:73-75)

"But God spoke to this effect, that his [*Abraham's*] **descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and *serve* Me in this place** [*Canaan*]**.'"** (Acts 7:6-7)

"Yet now I [*Paul*] **urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I *serve* stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'"** (Acts 27:22-24)

First, I [*Paul*] **thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I *serve* in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.** (Romans 1:8-10)

For they [*mankind*] **exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and *served* the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.** (Romans 1:25)

I [*Paul*] **thank God, whom I *serve* with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.** (II Timothy 1:3)

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works *to serve* the living God? (Hebrews 9:13-14)

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me [*John*]**, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb** [*Christ*]**. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they *serve* Him** [*Christ?*] **day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will**

spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:13-17)

Then he [*the angel*] **showed me** [*John*] **a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb** [*Christ*]**, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will *serve* Him** [*Christ*]**; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads** [*see Revelation 14:1*]**.** (Revelation 22:1-4)

diakoneo (1247): to be an attendant; minister unto, serve

This Greek word is included to help understand the use of the word *serve* in Matthew 20:28 and John 12:26. Five other representative verses are included to provide a better understanding of the use of this Greek word. The word occurs 36 times in Scripture but is never translated as *worship* in either the KJV or the NASB; instead, it always refers to some type of service to an individual or others.

But Jesus called them [*the twelve disciples*] **to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave** [servant]**; just as the Son of Man** [*Jesus*] **did not come *to be served*, but *to serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many."** (Matthew 20:25-28)

"If anyone *serves* Me [*Jesus*]**, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone *serves* Me, the Father will honor him."** (John 12:26)

Then the devil [*Satan*] **left Him** [*Jesus*]**; and behold, angels came and began *to minister* to Him.** (Matthew 4:11)

When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and *waited on* [ministered unto] **Him.** (Matthew 8:14-15)

Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while *ministering to* [*caring for*] **Him. Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.** (Matthew 27:55-56)

So the twelve [*apostles*] **summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order *to serve* tables."** (Acts 6:2)

But now, I [*Paul*] **am going to Jerusalem *serving*** [to minister unto] **the saints** [*believers*]**.** (Romans 15:25)

sebazomai (4573): to venerate; worship

The Greek word s*ebazomai* occurs only once in Scripture, in the following verse. This verse explains that, from the beginning, man has chosen to worship the creation instead of God our Creator. It is our nature to worship anyone or anything other than God (Romans 1:20-23; 3:9-18; 8:5-8; I Corinthians 2:14).

For they [*mankind*] **exchanged the truth of God for** [changed the truth of God into] **a lie, and *worshiped* and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.** (Romans 1:25)

sebomai (4576): to revere or adore; worship

There is a form of worship expressed in Scripture that only occasionally *appears* to refer to true worship of God; that is, we do not know if the worshipers were already saved before they heard and believed the message preached by Paul (as in Acts 13:43, Acts 16:14, and Acts 18:7). However, there are many false believers, some of whom sincerely profess to know and worship God, who actually worship someone in a religious manner that they understand to be God in their own mind (as in Acts 13:50; see also Acts 13:44-51; 18:4-6). The scribes and Pharisees, like many of our Christian leaders today, were overtly religious and were self-righteously convinced that they worshiped and obeyed God; Jesus showed them that their faith was in vain (i.e., they were not saved) by demonstrating their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-36).

Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the *God-fearing* [religious] **proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.** (Acts 13:43)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, *a worshiper* of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Then he [*Paul*] **left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, *a worshipe*r of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.** (Acts 18:7)

But the Jews incited the *devou*t women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. (Acts 13:50)

"Not only is there danger that this trade of ours [*idol makers*] **fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis** [Diana] **be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world *worship* will even be dethroned from her magnificence."** (Acts 19:27)

Who was Praised?

The following Greek words are translated as various forms of the word *praise*, as well as *Hosanna*, an exclamation of praise or adoration. In nearly all instances, when praise is directed toward a member of the Godhead, it is given to God the Father. In the case of *Hosanna*, however, praise is directed to Jesus as addressed below.

ainesis (133): a praising

This Greek word occurs only once in Scripture, and praise is directed to God the Father.

Through Him [*Christ*] **then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice *of praise* to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His** [*God's*] **name.** (Hebrews 13:15)

aineo (134): to praise, praising

Eight of the nine references with this Greek word refer to *praise* or *praising* God. The other reference (Romans 15:11) contains "praise the Lord," which is included in a quote from Psalm 117:1 referring to the Lord God. One would presume that because it is from the Old Testament that *the Lord God* is God the Father. However, as alluded to earlier, *the Lord God* in the Old Testament might be a veiled reference to God the Son

in some instances. In the context of Romans 15:11, though, praise appears to be directed to God the Father (see Romans 15:6-9).

> **"This will be a sign for you** [*shepherds*]**: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host *praising* God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."** (Luke 2:12-14)
>
> **The shepherds went back, glorifying and *praising* God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.** (Luke 2:20)
>
> **As soon as He** [*Jesus*] **was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to *praise* God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: "Blessed is the King** [*Jesus*] **who comes in the Name of the Lord** [*God*]**; peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** (Luke 19:37-38)
>
> **While He** [*Jesus*] **was blessing them** [*the disciples*]**, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple *praising* God.** (Luke 24:51-53)
>
> **For I** [*Paul*] **say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision** [*the Jews*] **on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers** [*Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*]**, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written** [*in prophecy*]**, "Therefore I will give praise to** [confess] **You among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name," Again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people** [*Israel*]**," And again, "*Praise* the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise** [laud] **Him." Again Isaiah says, "There shall come the root of Jesse** [*Christ, through David the son of Jesse—Matthew 1:1, 6*]**, and He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, in Him shall the Gentiles hope** [trust]**." Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** (Romans 15:8-13)
>
> **And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give *praise* to our God, all you His** [*God's*] **bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."** (Revelation 19:4-5)
>
> *(See also Acts 2:47; 3:8-9)*

ainos (136): praise

This Greek word appears only twice in Scripture. In Luke 18:42-43, praise was being given to God the Father. In Matthew 21:16, however, Jesus is apparently referring back to a psalm of David in Psalm 8:2. Although the context of the psalm is the Lord God, Jesus' reference to it suggests that the psalm is prophetically about Himself, which David would not have understood as he was writing it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I am not certain of this perspective, but it is supported by the praise of "Hosanna to the Son of David" in Matthew 21:15.

> **And Jesus said to him** [*a blind man*]**, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave *praise* to God.** (Luke 18:42-43)

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He [*Jesus*] **had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You** [*the Lord*] **have prepared *praise* for Yourself'?"** (Matthew 21:15-16)

humneo (5214): sing a hymn of praise; and ***humnos*** (5215): a hymn

The Greek word *humneo* only appears four times in Scripture. Twice, in Matthew 26:30 and its equivalent passage in Mark 14:26, it is used simply to refer to singing a hymn. The other two instances describe singing hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25; Hebrews 2:12). The related Greek word *humnos* occurs twice and also refers to singing hymns with thankfulness to God the Father (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and *singing hymns of praise to* God, and the prisoners were listening to them. (Acts 16:25)

For both He [*Christ*] **who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He** [*Christ*] **is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I** [*Christ*] **will proclaim Your** [*God's*] **name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I** [*Christ*] ***will sing* Your *praise*." And again, "I** [*Christ*] **will put My trust in Him** [*God*]**." And again, "Behold, I** [*Christ*] **and the children whom God has given Me."** (Hebrews 2:11-13)

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and *hymns* and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness [grace] **in your hearts to God** [the Lord]**.** (Colossians 3:16)

hosanna (5614): an exclamation of adoration

The Greek word *hosanna* is translated as "Hosanna" in Scripture six times, five of which were directed towards Jesus during the time when He entered Jerusalem (in three equivalent passages). The only other usage appears soon afterwards when Jesus was in the temple (Matthew 21:15). As noted earlier, the praise in this case was also directed to Jesus.

The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "*Hosanna* to the Son of David; blessed is He [*Jesus*] **who comes in the Name of the Lord** [*God*]**; *Hosanna* in the highest!"** (Matthew 21:9; see also Mark 11:9-10; John 12:12-13)

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He [*Jesus*] **had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "*Hosanna* to the Son of David," they became indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You** [*the Lord*] **have prepared praise for Yourself'?"** (Matthew 21:15-16)

Should we praise our Lord Jesus Christ in the same manner as the crowd during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the children in the temple? Brethren, Jesus did not physically come to us in this dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-12) as the Son of David and the King of Israel; instead, He is the ascended and glorified Lord who is head of the body—His body—in which we are members (Ephesians 1:18-23; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). It would not be correct, therefore, for us to praise Him in such a way.

To Whom was Given Glory?

Regarding the Godhead, giving glory and honor is directed to God the Father as a form of worship and in recognition of His sovereignty. There are numerous verses about Christ being glorified by the working of God (e.g., John 11:3-4; 12:16, 23; 13:31-32; Acts 3:13; II Thessalonians 1:9-12; Hebrews 2:7-8; I Peter 1:20-21), and through His glorification believers are also glorified (Romans 8:16-17, 28-30). However, after searching the Greek words for *glory* and its related words *glorify*, *glorified*, *glorifies*, *glorifying*, and *glorious*, I could find only one example of people giving glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, and it appears that those people did not believe who Jesus was (see Luke 4:14-15 under the Greek word *doxazo* below).

doxa (1391): glory, dignity, honor, praise, worship

In many of the following verses, it is apparent that glory is being given to God the Father as a form of praise or worship. Although some verses are not quite as straightforward (e.g., Hebrews 13:20-21; I Peter 4:11; II Peter 3:17-18), I believe that they are all are referring to God the Father as the object of praise. This position is based on similar phrases pertaining to God the Father in Romans 16:27, Galatians 1:3-5, Ephesians 3:20-21, Philippians 4:20, I Timothy 1:17, Jude 1:24-25, and Revelation 1:6, 4:11, and 14:6-7 provided below, as well as in Matthew 6:13, Romans 1:25 and 11:33-36, I Timothy 6:13-16, and I Peter 5:10-11.

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "*Glory* to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." (Luke 2:13-14)

So the sisters sent word to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he [*Lazarus*] **whom You love is sick." But when Jesus heard this, He said, "This sickness is not to end in death, but for the *glory* of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it."** (John 11:3-4)

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the *glory* forever. Amen. (Romans 16:27)

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the *glory* of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom [*God*] **be the *glory* forevermore. Amen.** (Galatians 1:3-5)

Now to Him [*God*] **who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him** [*God*] **be the *glory* in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Now to our God and Father be the *glory* forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:20)

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and *glory* forever and ever. Amen. (I Timothy 1:17)

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep [*kingdom believers of Israel—see Matthew 15:24; John 21:15-17*] **through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His** [*God's*] **will, working in us that which is pleasing in His** [*God's*] **sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom** [*God*] **be the *glory* forever and ever. Amen.** (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be

glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom [*God*] **belongs the *glory*** [praise] **and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (I Peter 4:11)

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him [*God—see II Peter 3:3-13*] **be the *glory*, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.** (II Peter 3:17-18)

Now to Him [*God*] **who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be *glory*, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.** (Jude 1:24-25)

And He [*Christ*] **has made us** [*the believing remnant of Israel*] **to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him** [*God*] **be the *glory* and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (Revelation 1:6)

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive *glory* and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him *glory*, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him [*God*] **who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."** (Revelation 14:6-7)

doxazo (1392): glorious, glorify, full of glory or honor

According to how this Greek word was translated, glory was given to God by both believers who recognized the glory of God, and by nonbelievers who were merely astonished by the miracles or teaching of Jesus. In one instance, as recorded in Luke 4:14-15, Jesus was praised (glorified) by *all* in the synagogues. Because most people in the synagogues—who were there to religiously worship God—did not actually believe who Jesus was and what He said (John 1:11; Matthew 27:22-23; Acts 2:22-23), their praise was more in amazement because of His fame instead of true glorification of Jesus or God the Father.

So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they *glorified* the God of Israel. (Matthew 15:31)

And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news [fame] **about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was *praised*** [glorified] **by all.** (Luke 4:14-15)

"But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He [*Jesus*] **said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home *glorifying* God. They** [*the crowd*] **were all struck with astonishment and began *glorifying* God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."** (Luke 5:24-26)

And Jesus said to him [*the blind man*]**, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, *glorifying* God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.** (Luke 18:42-43)

"Therefore if God gave to them [*the Gentiles*] **the same gift as He gave to us** [*the Jews*] **also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I** [*Peter*] **that I could stand in God's way?" When they**

[*the apostles and brethren*] **heard this, they quieted down and *glorified* God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."** (Acts 11:17-18)

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you [*brethren*] **may with one voice *glorify* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Romans 15:5-6)

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you [*brethren*] **as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, *glorify* God in the day of visitation.** (I Peter 2:12)

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be *glorified* through Jesus Christ, to whom [*God*] **belongs the glory** [praise] **and dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (I Peter 4:11)

If you [*brethren*] **are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if any suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to *glorify* God in this name** [*Christ*]**.** (I Peter 4:14-16)

endoxazomai (1740): to glorify

This Greek word occurs only twice—in one passage in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian brethren. He was encouraging the brethren as they were experiencing terrible persecution (II Thessalonians 1:3-8; I Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:13-16). Paul explained that God will judge the nonbelievers, in this case with specific reference to those who were persecuting the brethren, in that day when Christ will be glorified with His believers. At that time the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in them (and us), and they in Him. However, the Thessalonian brethren were not exhorted to give glory to Christ.

These [*nonbelievers*] **will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes *to be glorified* in His saints** [*believers*] **on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus *will be glorified* in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.** (II Thessalonians 1:9-12)

Who was Considered Blessed?

From our position as members of the body of Christ, we are to consider God the Father to be blessed, and we are to bless Him in our praise and worship. The only time Jesus was blessed by people was by a crowd that included both His disciples and those who were not saved, and He was correctly blessed as the King of Israel in accordance with prophecy. Christ is not our King, however. We are not exhorted to bless Him, but we are to bless God from whom He came to die for our sins.

ūlogeo (2127): to speak well of; to bless, praise

In its use regarding the Godhead, this Greek word is translated as both Jesus and God the Father being blessed or praised. However, in the case of Jesus being blessed, the praise is from a crowd, where it is doubtful that they were all believers (that is, true disciples of Jesus) because many referred to Him as the prophet Jesus

instead of Jesus the Son of God (Matthew 21:9-11). It is also used to describe how we have been blessed by God (Ephesians 1:3-6) and that we are to bless others (Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14).

> **And at once his** [*Zacharias'*] **mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak *in praise of* God.** (Luke 1:64)

> **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, '*Blessed* is He** [*Jesus*] **who comes in the name of the Lord** [*God*]**!'"** (Luke 13:34-35; see also Matthew 23:37-39)

> **As soon as He** [*Jesus*] **was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples** [*followers*] **began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: "*Blessed* is the King** [*Jesus*] **who comes in the Name of the Lord** [*God*]**; peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"** (Luke 19:37-38; see also Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; John 12:12-13)

ūlogeetos (2128): blessed

Ūlogeetos appears eight times in Scripture, and it is always used regarding praise to God the Father. Even in Romans 9:5, which has some slightly awkward grammar, God is the one who is blessed because He brought forth Christ in the flesh through his chosen people of Israel.

> **"*Blessed* be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people."** (Luke 1:68)

> ***Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.** (II Corinthians 1:3)

> ***Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.** (Ephesians 1:3)

> ***Blessed* be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** (I Peter 1:3)

> **For I** [*Paul*] **could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises** [*of God*]**, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God *blessed* forever. Amen.** (Romans 9:3-5)

> *(See also Mark 14:61; Romans 1:25; II Corinthians 11:31)*

Who was Thanked?

Being thankful (or grateful) is more an attitude of humility than it is a form of worship. Whether to God or to people, our thankfulness demonstrates that we appreciate what someone has done for us. Although most uses of the following Greek words describe thankfulness to God the Father, we also see examples of how we should be thankful to our Lord Jesus Christ for what He has done for us.

ūkaristeo (2168): to be grateful; to express gratitude

When this Greek word is used in the context of giving thanks to the Godhead, thanksgiving is always directed to God the Father. In many instances, Apostle Paul was thanking God for what He had done or was doing for and through his fellow brethren. Through several verses, we are reminded that we can thank God directly because of what our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us at the cross; Christ is the mediator between us and God (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Having said this, he [*Paul*] **took bread and gave *thanks* to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.** (Acts 27:35)

First, I [*Paul*] ***thank* my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.** (Romans 1:8)

I [*Paul*] ***thank* my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus.** (I Corinthians 1:4)

For this reason I [*Paul*] **too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving *thanks* for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him** [*God*]**.** (Ephesians 1:15-17)

I [*Paul*] ***thank* my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.** (Philippians 1:3-5)

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving *thanks* through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

We give *thanks* to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. (I Thessalonians 1:2-3)

For this reason we also constantly *thank* God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (I Thessalonians 2:13)

We ought always to give *thanks* to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater. (II Thessalonians 1:3)

But we should always give *thanks* to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Thessalonians 2:13-14)

I [*Paul*] ***thank* my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints** [*believers*]**; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.** (Philemon 1:4-6)

(See also Romans 7:25; Ephesians 5:18-20; Colossians 1:3; Revelation 11:15-17)

ūkaristia (2169): gratitude; thankfulness, giving of thanks

Most of the uses of *ūkaristia* are translated as thanks or thanksgiving to God the Father. As shown in Colossians 2:6-7, however, we are also to express thanksgiving or gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ because we are in Him and He is in us.

> **For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of *thanks* to abound to the glory of God.** (II Corinthians 4:15)
>
> **Now He** [*God*] **who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing *thanksgiving* to God.** (II Corinthians 9:10-11)
>
> **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with *thanksgiving* let your requests be make known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:6-7)
>
> **Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with *gratitude*** [thanksgiving]**.** (Colossians 2:6-7)

karis (5485): graciousness; gratitude

The Greek word *karis* appears often in the New Testament. Usually, it is used to describe the grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2:40; Acts 20:24; Romans 5:15; I Corinthians 1:3). When rendered as thanks to the Godhead, it is directed toward God the Father except in one instance (I Timothy 1:12) where it is directed to God the Son.

> **But *thanks* be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him** [*Christ*] **in every place.** (II Corinthians 2:14)
>
> ***Thanks* be to God for His indescribable gift!** (II Corinthians 9:15)
>
> **I** [*Paul*] ***thank* Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.** (I Timothy 1:12; see also Acts 9:1-16; 22:1-15)
>
> **I** [*Paul*] ***thank* God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.** (II Timothy 1:3)

Who was Prayed To?

Prayer is another expression of humility because we are (or should be) acknowledging our reliance on someone greater than us. To me, therefore, prayer is also a form of worship. In all uses of the Greek words for prayer to the Godhead, it is directed to God the Father (the self-righteous Pharisees also prayed, but to the *God* of their imagination for their own glory—Luke 5:33; Matthew 6:5). There are no examples of anyone praying to our Lord Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus prayed to His Father and instructed His disciples to pray to God (Luke 6:12; John 17:1-26; Hebrews 5:7; Matthew 6:6-13).

Because Christ is the mediator between us and God, we are able to pray directly to God the Father in and for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; II Thessalonians 1:11-12). The other person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, also is deeply involved in our prayers because He interprets our prayers according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27). This study is not about the purpose of

prayer,[12] but please note what is said in the prayers that are provided for us and what people were praying for in the following example passages (see also Ephesians 3:14-21).

I will not try to explain the grammatical differences in the following Greek words regarding prayer because in most cases I do not know enough to do so. However, I will let the content of the verses speak for themselves. The following verses are not the only ones for these Greek words, but hopefully I have provided enough examples to demonstrate the point that we are to pray to God the Father instead of to our Lord Jesus Christ.

de-eesis (1162): a petition; prayer, request, supplication

> **Brethren, my heart's desire and my *prayer* to God for them** [Israel—*the Jews*] **is for their salvation. For I** [*Paul*] **testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.** (Romans 10:1-2)

> **I** [*Paul*] **thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering *prayer* with joy in my every *prayer* for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.** (Philippians 1:3-5)

> **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and *supplication* with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:6-7)

> **With all prayer and *petition*** [supplication] **pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with perseverance and *petition*** [supplication] **for all the saints** [*believers*]**, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me** [*Paul*] **in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains** [*prison*]**; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.** (Ephesians 6:18-20)

> **I** [*Paul*] **thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my *prayers* night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy.** (II Timothy 1:3-4)

ūkomai (2172): to wish; pray, will, wish

> **Now we *pray* to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved. For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also *pray*** [wish] **for, that you be made complete.** (II Corinthians 13:7-9)

> **And Paul said, "I would *wish* to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you** [*King Agrippa*]**, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."** (Acts 26:29)

prosūkee (4335): prayer (worship); pray earnestly, prayer

> **It was at this time that He** [*Jesus*] **went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in *prayer* to God.** (Luke 6:12)

[12] See my study **Prayer** that describes its purpose.

For God, whom I [*Paul*] **serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my *prayers* making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.** (Romans 1:9-10)

Now I [*Paul*] **urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your *prayers* to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient** [do not believe] **in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints** [*believers*]**; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.** (Romans 15:30-33)

For this reason I [*Paul*] **too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints** [*believers*]**, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my *prayers*; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him** [*God*]**. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His** [*God's*] **calling, what are the riches of the glory of His** [*God's*] **inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His** [*God's*] **power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His** [*God's*] **might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He** [*God*] **put all things in subjection under His** [*Christ's*] **feet, and gave Him** [*Christ*] **as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him** [*God*—see Ephesians 4:6] **who fills all in all.** (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by *prayer* and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Devote yourselves to *prayer*, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:2-4)

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our *prayers*; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father. (I Thessalonians 1:2-3)

I [*Paul*] **thank my God always, make mention of you in my *prayers*, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints** [*believers*]**; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.** (Philemon 1:4-6)

prosūkomai (4336): to pray; supplicate, worship

"But you, when you *pray*, go into your inner room, close your door and *pray* to Your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

"*Pray*, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from

evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.[13]**]'"** (Matthew 6:9-13; see also Luke 11:1-4)

And He [*Jesus*] **withdrew from them** [*the disciples*] **about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to *pray*, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was *praying* very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.** (Luke 22:41-44; see also Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42)

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to *pray* as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He [*God*] **who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He** [*the Spirit*] **intercedes for the saints** [*believers*] **according to the will of God.** (Romans 8:26-27)

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *praying* always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints [*believers*]**.** (Colossians 1:3-4)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to *pray* for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His [*God's*] **will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His** [*God's*] **glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.** (Colossians 1:9-12)

Rejoice always; *pray* without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Brethren, *pray* for us [*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy—I Thessalonians 1:1*]**.** (I Thessalonians 5:25)

To this end also we *pray* for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus [Christ] **will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.** (II Thessalonians 1:11-12)

Who Did Jesus Say to Worship?

As previously discussed, when Jesus was in their presence the disciples and others sometimes *worshiped* or bowed down before Him (Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 14:31-33; 20:20; 28:16-17; Luke 24:51-53). This was done either as a humble demonstration of respect or honor, or because He was recognized as the Son of God, the Messiah, and the King of Israel. However, this is not the same type of worship that they gave God the Father. They would not have given their praise to Jesus in the temple, which was the house of God (Luke 24:53). Nor would they have brought their offerings to be sacrificed to Jesus.

Jesus instructed His disciples and others (including Satan) to worship the Lord God—God the Father. He also recognized the authority of His Father by praying to Him and telling His disciples to pray to God. It seems

[13] This clause is in the KJV but, according to my NASB column note, is not found in early manuscripts. Nor is it in the account in Luke 11:1-4 in either version.

logical that Jesus would not worship Himself and yet, through their words and actions, some brethren focus their worship on Jesus.

> **Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"** (Matthew 4:10)

> **"Our** [*Samaritan*] **fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people** [*the Jews of Judea*] **say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit** [a Spirit]**, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."** (John 4:20-24)

> **It was at this time that He** [*Jesus*] **went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.** (Luke 6:12)

In His Name

Everyone who calls on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be, or are, saved (Romans 10:13; Acts 9:13-14). However, no one actually calls out to the Lord to be saved, because it is God who does the calling (Romans 8:28-30; I Corinthians 1:2, 9, 22-24; Galatians 1:6-7; I Thessalonians 4:7; II Thessalonians 2:13-14; II Timothy 1:8-9)—no one seeks for God. Therefore, in this context, those who *call on the name of the Lord* are those who believe the gospel of salvation that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead.

At the moment of belief, we are acknowledging our need for salvation and recognizing the redemptive work of Christ at the cross for us, and we become fully identified with Christ. By the working of God, we are washed (cleansed from the consequences of our sins through the shed blood of Christ), sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—we are complete in Him (Colossians 2:9-10).

> **Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in** [by] **the Spirit of our God.** (I Corinthians 6:11)

The apostles had the authority to perform miracles and to make exhortations and commands in accordance with the will of God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6; 16:18; I Corinthians 1:10; 5:4-5; II Thessalonians 3:6). Their ability, and authority, to do so were proof of their apostleship (II Corinthians 12:12). Brethren, we do not have that authority; those who think that they do are falsely claiming authority that they do not have and are taking the name of our Lord in vain.

Despite various denominational teaching or traditions, there have been no apostles since Paul, who was chosen by God to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1; I Timothy 1:1). However, there have been (and continue to be) false apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers who are not children of God and who are actually servants of Satan while conducting their self-righteous *ministry* in the name of God or Jesus (II Corinthians 11:12-15; Philippians 3:2, 18-19; Titus 1:10-16). Sadly, there are also brethren who, either through misunderstanding or misappropriation of the word of God, or through motivation of their own fleshly minds and desires, falsely claim the authority and ability to perform miracles and prophesy in the name of our Lord (Colossians 2:18-19; I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:3-4).

So, what does it mean to worship God and live our lives in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ? We are exhorted to do all things and to give thanks to God for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20). Jesus Christ is the mediator between us and God because of what He did for us at the cross (I Timothy 2:5-6; Romans 5:1-11; 8:33-34; Ephesians 2:13-18).

Furthermore, we are His ambassadors (II Corinthians 5:20). Doing things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ means that we are serving God by the authority, and as the representatives, of our Lord. By walking worthy of our calling, which is our salvation in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12), the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in us, and we will be glorified in Him. Brethren, this is a tremendous responsibility, and we need to be careful not to walk (live our lives) in such a way that grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and takes the name of our Lord in vain.

> **Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** (Colossians 3:17)

> **To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus** [Christ] **will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.** (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; see also Philippians 2:12-13)

What About Angels?

It is not uncommon for nonbelievers, as well as some brethren, to worship angels. For some, angels are viewed in such a way that God (whether as the Father, the Son, and/or the Holy Spirit) is not even necessary or relevant. By listening to false teachers, the Galatian brethren had so distorted the gospel that was preached to them that they were in essence deserting God. Paul called them foolish and sternly warned them against listening to any gospel other than what they had been taught by Paul, even if they heard it from an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1-3). Furthermore, we are instructed not to worship angels; instead, we are to worship God.

> **Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize** [*completeness in Christ—Colossians 2:8-15*] **by delighting in self-abasement** [*false humility*] **and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen** [*figments of imagination*]**, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head** [*Christ*]**, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.** (Colossians 2:18-19)

> **I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."** (Revelation 22:8-9; see also Revelation 19:9-10)

Conclusions

So, does it matter if we worship God the Father, God the Son, and/or God the Holy Spirit as long as we are worshiping *God*? Brethren, according to Scripture, it matters who we worship. We are children of God and not children of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. We are saved by the choice and working of God because of what His Son Jesus Christ did for us at the cross.

To summarize, the verses and passages presented in this study tell us the following truths regarding who we are to worship:

- We are to worship God the Father for He is the Almighty God.
- We are to praise God the Father for what He has done and is doing for us and through us.
- We are to give God the glory.
- It is God the Father who is blessed for what He did for us through Christ.
- It is God the Father who we should thank for what He accomplished for us through Christ.
- We are to pray to God the Father.
- We are to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.
- We are not commanded or instructed to worship our Lord Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit.
- We are not to worship angels.

As we have seen, Jesus was worshiped during His earthly ministry, although not in the same way we are to worship God the Father. It was done out of respect for who He was or as thanksgiving for something He did. We must remember, however, that we are to know and recognize our Savior as the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ and not as Jesus the man (His position of humility—Philippians 2:5-11) who ministered on earth (II Corinthians 5:14-16).

As Jesus told Satan, we are to worship God the Father (Matthew 4:10). We are able to do this because of what our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us at the cross. Brethren, it is God who raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:22-24; Romans 10:9; I Corinthians 6:14; I Thessalonians 1:9-10). It is God who saved us through the shed blood of Christ and blessed us with all spiritual blessings (Romans 3:21-26; 5:9; Colossians 1:19-20; Titus 3:4-7; Ephesians 1:3-7). It is God who reconciled us to Himself through the work of Christ (Romans 5:10-11; II Corinthians 5:18-19). It is God who is working through us according to His will (Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; Romans 8:28).

Apostle Paul, who focused his worship on God the Father and instructed the brethren to do so, was also thankful to our Lord Jesus Christ for appointing him to be His servant. Brethren, consider what our Lord accomplished for us at the cross. We should be humbled and forever thankful for what He did for us. This is not the same as worshiping Christ, because we are to worship God the Father.

> **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.** (I Timothy 1:12)

> **Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.** (Colossians 2:6-7)

We are ambassadors for Christ, so we are His representatives on this earth—we are here in Christ's stead. Paul was a bondservant of Christ Jesus (Romans 1:1). We should live our lives as servants of Christ, also, because we were bought with a price—His shed blood for our sins (I Corinthians 6:19-20; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:24-26). Let us remember these things as we honor and worship God our Father—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

> **Therefore, we** [*believers—children of God*] **are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you** [*fellow brethren*] **on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He** [*God*] **made Him** [*Christ*] **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (II Corinthians 5:20-21)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom [*God*] **be the glory forevermore. Amen.** (Galatians 1:3-5)

To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 16:27)

Appendix C

The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)

I briefly address the mystery in Chapter 4 and refer to it on other occasions. Unfortunately, few believers know anything about the mystery or have even heard of it. Thankfully, some independent organizations, churches, and Bible study groups teach it. Also, there are some books and pamphlets about the mystery by nondenominational Christian writers.

The first time I heard or read anything about the mystery was when I read the book *Things That Differ: The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism* by Cornelius Stam in 1974 when I was 18. I explain the circumstances and impact of reading that book in my article **Testimony of Grace** on the website. I have not read it through since then but occasionally go back to it to compare his thoughts with my own. I know there are some doctrinal positions about which I disagree with Pastor Stam; however, his book made a significant impact on my life, and I have often recommended or given it to others.

I have learned a great deal about the mystery from Mr. Stam's book mentioned above as well as from other books and pamphlets written by him, other pastors, and Bible teachers. I was also blessed by the teaching of Pastor Win Johnson while attending his church in Thornton, Colorado, for about two years starting in October 1976. I took notes during every sermon, which included a series of messages on the mystery, and refer to them on occasion.

The following study on the mystery represents my own perspective, though I doubt that I have any original ideas or conclusions. It is what I truly believe and is based on my investigations of Scripture that depended heavily on my set of concordances and my years of Bible study and teaching. It is included as an appendix because I believe that understanding the mystery, which is revealed and explained throughout (and only in) Paul's letters, is the key to understanding the entire Bible and how God wants us to walk as members of the body of Christ in this dispensation or administration of the grace of God. I humbly admit that I learn more about the mystery and the grace of God with every study that I prepare. My hope and prayer are that this study is as enlightening to you as it has been to me.

The Mystery
(God's Secret Plan)

Introduction

Brethren, do you believe:

- You were saved by grace through faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9)?
- Your faith was expressed by believing that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, which is the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14)?
- That upon believing the gospel of salvation you were spiritually baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13)?
- Christ is the head of the church, which is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18)?
- You are a member of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13, 27; Romans 12:5)?
- The body of Christ is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles[1] without distinction (Ephesians 2:16; Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28)?
- You are, at this moment, recognized by God as seated in Christ at the right hand of God in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6)?
- You will go to heaven when you die (Philippians 3:20; II Corinthians 5:8)?
- You are blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3)?
- In the blessed hope, commonly called *the rapture*, which refers to you being caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Colossians 3:4; Titus 2:13)?
- You are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses but under grace (Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:13)?
- You are an ambassador for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20)?

I hope you can join me in answering "Yes" to all these questions. Did you know that all these truths of God were revealed to us only through Apostle Paul? Did you know that if you believe these things that you believe *the mystery*? Let us see what Scripture has to say about the mystery.[2]

The Mystery Revealed

We are familiar with the division of the Bible into the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. According to Scripture, both testaments represent covenants made directly between God and Israel (Hebrews 9:11-22). The old testament, or covenant, began when God gave His chosen people (Israel) His law through Moses (Exodus 19:5-6; 24:8; Deuteronomy 5:1-3). The implementation of the new testament was revealed by Christ as He spoke of imminently shedding His blood for His people at the cross (Luke 22:20). Israel was the promised (prophesied) beneficiary of the new covenant because it will cause the believing remnant (still in the future) to automatically, by nature, obey the requirements of the old covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:26-27). What about before Israel? What about us?

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[1] In Scripture, Jews (or Judeans) are descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whereas Gentiles (also referred to as Greeks) include everyone else.

[2] All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (*NASB Side-Column Reference Edition,* Copyright © 1996 by The Lockman Foundation) unless otherwise noted. Nonbolded words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* (KJV) or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

There are other, often less understood, major divisions or distinctions within the Bible. For example, there are the Law of Moses and the grace of God, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God, and Israel and the body of Christ. All these distinctions, which together encompass the period from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21 (and after), fall under the major division of *prophesy* and *mystery*, or that which was spoken since the world began versus that which was hidden in God since *before* the world began. Prophecy explains God's earthly plan, while the mystery reveals His heavenly—and eternal—plan. Understanding this distinction is the key to understanding the Bible and which commands and promises apply to whom (II Timothy 2:15).

Prophesy—Since the World Began

The events of Christ's birth, ministry to Israel, death, and resurrection were prophesied throughout the Old Testament (Matthew 1:22-23; 2:13-15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; etc.). His disciples, however, did not understand what the Prophets were referring to until Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:44-45). Even the fact that He would bear the sins of many and that His shed blood would justify the many was foretold; however, *the many* applied directly to the believers of His people Israel (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Therefore, God's plan regarding Christ's work for Israel was revealed in the Old Testament. Because of those prophesies, the people of Israel were looking forward to their Messiah, national deliverance from the oppression of their enemies, and their promised kingdom (on earth). However, because of their stubbornness and disobedience, the nation did not recognize or believe that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah.

> **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant—as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old**." (Luke 1:68-70)

> **And He** [*Jesus*] **said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** (Luke 24:25-27)

> **Now He** [*Jesus*] **said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."** (Luke 24:44)

> **"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, 'the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him** [*Christ*] **you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you** [*Israel*] **who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed** [*Christ*] **all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' For you first, God has raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."** (Acts 3:18-26)

Mystery—Since Before the World Began

When Apostle Paul wrote of the mystery, he was not referring to something mysterious, or something difficult to comprehend. He was simply referring to a body of truths that had previously been hidden in God—truths that God had not revealed to mankind until He did so through Paul. These truths were God's secret plan or His sacred secret—they had not even been hinted at by the prophets of God or by Christ while He was on earth. We will see that the components of the mystery are all based on the work of Christ at the cross. Although Christ's death, burial, and resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament and by Christ Himself during His ministry on earth, the full ramifications of His work at the cross were hidden in God until revealed through Paul. The resulting blessings could not be found in the Law and the Prophets—they were the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8). In fact, we are told that the rulers of that time would not have crucified Christ had they known the mystery regarding His work at the cross.

> **Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages** [world] **to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** (I Corinthians 2:6-8)
>
> **Now to Him** [*God*] **who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past** [since the world began]**.** (Romans 16:25)
>
> **Of this church I** [*Paul*] **was made a minister according to the stewardship** [dispensation] **from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of** [fulfill] **the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1:25-27)
>
> **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship** [dispensation] **of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations** [ages] **was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.** (Ephesians 3:1-5)
>
> **To me** [*Paul*]**, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable** [unsearchable] **riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages** [from the beginning of the world] **has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.** (Ephesians 3:8-10)

How did God reveal His mystery to Paul? He did so through multiple revelations by our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ to Paul, beginning with his conversion on the road to Damascus where he was headed to imprison the followers of Jesus so as to destroy what was considered to be *the Way* (Acts 9:1-6; 22:14-15; 26:12-18; Galatians 1:11-12; Romans 16:25; II Corinthians 12:1-4; Ephesians 3:1-3). The revelations were so significant that God gave Paul some type of *thorn in the flesh* to remind Paul to keep from exulting himself for receiving the revelations (II Corinthians 12:5-10).

Specific Aspects of the Mystery

Through this revelation of the mystery to Paul, we learn that Paul was the dispenser of God's gospel of grace (Acts 20:24) just as Moses was the dispenser of God's law. God spoke to Paul through the resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, and to Moses as Jehovah (who apparently was Christ[3]). Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed both prophecy and the mystery.

Furthermore, the mystery fulfilled the word of God (Colossians 1:25-27). From the beginning of Genesis until Paul (his ministry as recorded in Acts and in his letters Romans through Philemon), and from Hebrews through Revelation, the word of God describes His earthly plans and program. God's earthly program points to a heavenly kingdom on earth where Israel will be the chosen nation and His Son will reign as Messiah and King. The prophesies in the book of Revelation fill in the details of what was already spoken by the prophets since the world began and complete the word of God concerning His earthly kingdom (Revelation 22:18-19).

The revelation of the mystery through Paul concerns God's heavenly program, which is an administration or dispensation He kept secret in Himself since before the world began. Through it, we have the full story of what God has chosen to reveal about His eternal plan that is described as the manifold (bringing everything together; multifaceted) wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:8-11). The mystery completes the word of God by revealing what God had intended from the beginning: everything He had planned through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

This mystery includes the following specific aspects or components of revelation, which are briefly described in this study:

- The mystery of the church—the body of Christ (and the mystery of Christ)
- The mystery of the wisdom of God
- The mystery of the gospel (and the mystery of the faith)
- The mystery of Israel's blindness
- The mystery of being caught up and changed (the rapture)
- The mystery of lawlessness
- The mystery of godliness
- The mystery of God's will (the fullness of times)

The Mystery of the Church—the Body of Christ (and the Mystery of Christ)

> **Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.** (Ephesians 5:22-32—KJV)

[3] See my study **Who Do We Worship?** that addresses this statement.

The greatest or most profound aspect of the revelation of the mystery is that Christ is the head of the church, which is His body. In this passage Paul likens our relationship with Christ to God's intended relationship between a husband and wife. We are one with Christ, but He is the head, and a husband should love his own wife as his own body just as Christ loves the members of His body.

So, what is a church? The Greek word translated as church is *ekklesia*, which means congregation or called-out assembly. The people of Israel who escaped from Egypt were referred to as a church in the wilderness (Acts 7:37-38—KJV). Jesus referred to the believers who followed Him during His ministry on earth, as well as those of the future kingdom during His reign as King, as a church (Matthew 16:18; 18:15-17). In four instances Paul refers to a church in a person's house (Romans 16:5; I Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). A church, therefore, is not considered by God to be a building or an organization, but a group of people.

It is commonly taught that the church started at Pentecost; however, no church started at Pentecost. Following Peter's proclamation of Israel's guilt in the crucifixion of Christ, several thousand people were *added* to an existing church when they repented for killing their Messiah and were baptized (Acts 2:37-42). This covenant church, or called-out assembly, was composed of Jews and Jewish proselytes (Gentiles who became as Jews by submitting to the Law of Moses) who believed the gospel of the kingdom preached by John the Baptist, Christ, and the twelve apostles.[4] It was to this little flock (Luke 12:32; Acts 1:15) that about 3,000 believers were added on the day of Pentecost and even more during subsequent days (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14).

Through Paul we learn that the church of today is the body of Christ, with Christ as the head, and that it is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles without distinction. In fact, members of the body of Christ are no longer considered to be Jews or Gentiles—our physical heritage has no meaning or significance to God. Contrary to those at Pentecost who were saved by repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, members of the body of Christ (us) are saved by believing the gospel of salvation: that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again for our justification and righteousness (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 4:23 – 5:11). Brethren, this is a significant difference and is explained in Paul's letters as part of the revelation of the mystery.

> **And He** [*God*] **put all things in subjection under His** [*Christ's*] **feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.** (Ephesians 1:22-23)
>
> **For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews of Greeks** [*Gentiles*]**, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.** (I Corinthians 12:12-13)
>
> **There is neither Jew nor Greek** [*Gentile*]**, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus**. (Galatians 3:28)
>
> **For He Himself** [*Christ*] **is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.** (Ephesians 2:14-16)

[4] See my study **Which Gospel?** for an examination of the gospel of the kingdom and the other gospels in Scripture.

The mystery of the body of Christ, I believe, is also referred to as *the mystery of Christ*. The fact that Christ is in us and we are in Christ is a blessing that was not known by, or applicable to, believers before He revealed it to Paul. Also, it was through Paul and his testimony that the apostles and prophets learned of the mystery of Christ (Acts 15:1-22; Galatians 2:1-9; Ephesians 3:4-5; II Peter 3:14-16).

> **For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship** [dispensation] **of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations** [ages] **was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.** (Ephesians 3:1-7)

The passages above demonstrate why the mystery of the church is the greatest aspect of the mystery. We see that it was God's plan from the beginning to reconcile the world to Himself through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. In revealing this mystery, we (believers) learn the following truths about Christ's accomplishment for us at the cross and our relationship with God—truths hidden in God until He revealed them through Paul.

- Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, who seated our resurrected and glorified Lord at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion (Ephesians 1:19-21).
- Personal salvation in this dispensation of grace occurs when we believe the gospel of salvation—that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again—and that it is by faith alone, apart from any kind of works that were previously required by God (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- All people were condemned by sin and, therefore, all people who believe the gospel of salvation—whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, or slave or free—are one in Christ without distinction (Romans 10:12; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:16).
- Upon believing the gospel of salvation God made us members of Christ's body—we are in Christ and He is in us (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Romans 8:1, 9-11; 12:4-5; Colossians 1:27).
- At the moment of belief in the gospel, we were baptized[5] by the Holy Spirit into Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit—our salvation is secure and nothing can separate us from the love of God (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39).
- Because we are in Christ, we are seated with Him at the right hand of God (Ephesians 2:4-6). As such, we are citizens of heaven and Christ's ambassadors on earth (Philippians 3:20-21; II Corinthians 5:20).
- The Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments), which was the old covenant given to Israel, not only separated Jews from Gentiles, but proved to separate all people from God because it is righteous and we are not (Galatians 3:10-13; II Corinthians 3:4-6). The Law condemned not only God's covenant nation, but everyone. However, when Christ died on the cross, the Law was

[5] This baptism is a spiritual baptism, or identification, performed by the Holy Spirit. It is not water baptism and is not to be represented by water baptism—it is the *one baptism* referred to in Ephesians 4:5. Also, it is different than the baptism referred to by John the Baptist, who said that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit that resulted in the believer receiving the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). See my study **Should We Be Baptized?** for more information on the various baptisms in Scripture and which one applies today.

figuratively and effectively nailed with Him—it was taken out of the way (Colossians 2:13-14; Romans 3:19-26; 8:3).[6] Therefore, there is no longer any difference between Jews and Gentiles or any barrier between God and man (Ephesians 2:14-16).

If the church, which is the body of Christ, did not start at Pentecost, when did it start? The mystery of the church was first revealed to Paul, so it follows that Paul was the first member of the body of Christ. In I Timothy 1:12-17 Paul described himself as the foremost, or chief, of sinners who was saved not only by the mercy and grace of God but as an example for all subsequent believers. Paul's salvation was different than that of the other apostles and disciples before him in that he was not presented with the gospel of the kingdom and was not told to repent and be baptized to be saved.[7] Because of the miracles that followed, Paul likely was saved on that road to Damascus the moment he believed what the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ said to him (Acts 9:1-18; 22:6-16).

Consider what it takes to become a member of the church, which is the body of Christ. All that is required is to believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ's work at the cross for us, apart from any works of righteousness of our own (Ephesians 2:8 -9). Consider, then, what is required to join churches today. All denominational and most independent churches have certain requirements beyond faith to become a member, such as some specific form of water baptism, completion of classes on denominational or church doctrine, interview and approval by the pastor or the church board, etc. Some denominations and churches do not even require that a person profess faith in the gospel of salvation. It is disconcerting that more is required to join an organized church than to become a member of the body of Christ. Unfortunately, Christianity has added unscriptural requirements just as the spiritual leaders of Israel added to or changed the Law of Moses to suit their needs or desires.

The Mystery of the Wisdom of God

> **Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages** [world] **to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** (I Corinthians 2:6-8)

The fact that God is wiser than mankind or any person is not a mystery. God's wisdom is different than our wisdom. In the Scripture preceding the above passage, Paul demonstrates that human wisdom was not sufficient to know God. Although Christ was in their midst as one of their own, the Jews did not recognize Him because they continually looked for miraculous signs (I Corinthians 1:22; John 1:11; 4:48; Mark 8:11-12). Unfortunately, Israel's history showed that they did not believe God despite all the signs from God that they witnessed. Just as ineffectually, the rest of us (Gentiles) have a long history of seeking after wisdom—our own wisdom—to elevate ourselves to, or to appease, the god(s) of our imagination (Colossians 2:16-23). Where has it gotten us?

The revelation of the mystery (and the gospel of the grace of God) is based on Christ's complete and all-sufficient work at the cross for us—His death, burial, and resurrection to remove the penalty for our sin and to make us alive in Christ. Paul refers to the message regarding this work as the preaching (or word) of the

[6] See my study **The Law of Moses** that describes the Law and its purpose.

[7] Paul was baptized, but only because that is all Ananias knew to do—it was required by God. However, it occurred *after* Paul miraculously regained his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit instead of before as established under the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 2:38).

cross, and it is what he emphasized above all else (I Corinthians 1:18; 2:1-5). However, this message about the work of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews because they would not admit that they killed their Messiah and desired, instead, to attain their righteousness through the Law of Moses (Romans 9:30-33). And this message was, and continues to be, considered foolishness by the Gentiles because it is nonsense (unnatural) to think someone would die for his enemy (Romans 5:6-10). To us who believe, however, it is the power of God and the reason for our salvation (I Corinthians 1:18-31). What part of all this demonstrates the mystery of the wisdom of God?

Brethren, God is sovereign. We are subject to His will—He is not subject to our will (Job 23:13; Psalm 33:8-11; Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; 21:30; Isaiah 14:27; Daniel 4:35; Romans 9: 14-21; Ephesians 1:11; Philippians 2:13). Through Paul we understand that this mystery concerning our Lord's work at the cross was God's plan from the very beginning—it was not an afterthought, or *Plan B*, in reaction to our sinfulness. Because of His wisdom, God already knew beforehand that, given a choice, mankind would choose to worship the creation instead of the Creator. Mankind did as expected (and continues to do so), and God gave them over to sin (Romans 1:18-32). Because of the sinfulness of the nations, and according to His plan, God raised up a new nation (Israel) and gave them His law and ordinances (the Law of Moses). However, as God knew would occur beforehand, the people of Israel proved their humanity and disobeyed the Law while trying to attain their own righteousness through the Law—they were not following the Law by faith (Jeremiah 31:32; Acts 7:52-53; Romans 2:23-24). Even when God sent His own Son to His people Israel, they rejected and crucified Him (John 1:11; Acts 2:22-23), exactly as prophesied. Consequently, all of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, proved to be unrighteous (Romans 3:9-18), just as God knew we would before He made us.

Therefore, even before the world began, God planned to provide a remedy for our sin through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ at the cross. Everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (the gospel of salvation— I Corinthians 15:1-4), is an adopted child of God (Romans 8:14-17) and is a member of the body of Christ. The revelation of this eternal plan of God—the mystery—ties the whole Bible together. Without the revelation of the mystery through Paul, Gentiles could not approach God without becoming a Jewish proselyte and would have no hope in becoming one with Christ. Additionally, the fate of everyone (Jew and Gentile) would rest on our own futile works of righteousness (see Romans 3:10) instead of Christ's righteousness. The mystery, therefore, presents the *manifold* wisdom of God—it is the key information that fulfills or completes the word of God (Colossians 1:25-27).

> **To me** [*Paul*]**, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable** [unsearchable] **riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration** [fellowship] **of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Ephesians 3:8-11)

It was because of God's eternal purpose through the work of Christ at the cross that anyone could, or can, have fellowship with God and be counted as righteous; that is, saved from the eternal consequences of sin. From Adam forward, until Christ's saving work at the cross was revealed through Paul, people were saved by the future work of Christ even though they did not know this. Prior to the Law of Moses, people were saved by believing what God told them (directly as Jehovah or through prophets, angels, visions, and dreams). For example, Noah believed what God told him and obediently built an ark (Genesis 6:13-22), and Abraham believed God when he was told that he would be the father of countless descendants and many nations (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:1-6; 17:1-7). These men continued to sin, so how were they saved? Unknown to them, God imputed the future saving work of Christ on them because of their faith. Under the Law of Moses,

which was in full effect until the gospel of grace was revealed to us through Paul,[8] a person's (a Jew's or Jewish proselyte's) faith was demonstrated by humbly submitting to the Law of Moses as God commanded (Romans 9:30-32). In other words, salvation was by faith plus works as explained in the following *mystery of the gospel*.

Paul said that not many wise, mighty, or noble people are saved (I Corinthians 1:26-28). If the wisest people on earth are not wise enough to understand the preaching of the cross, how is it that anyone can understand these things? It is by faith that we believe the truth of God, and it is the Holy Spirit of God who enables us to believe (Romans 10:17; Ephesians 1:13-14; II Thessalonians 2:13-14). Because we (believers) have the Holy Spirit in us, we are able to comprehend the things of God—things that those who are not saved cannot understand and consider to be foolish (I Corinthians 2:10-16).[9]

That God chooses the lowliest things to confound the wisest people of this world (I Corinthians 1:26-29) was demonstrated when Jesus chose his twelve disciples. None of the twelve were men of prestige or wisdom (Acts 4:13), with one even being a despised tax collector for the Roman government (Matthew 9:9-13). Yet when these men (excluding Judas who was replaced by Matthias according to God's will) were filled with the Holy Spirit, the people were truly amazed (Acts 2:5-13). However, prior to his salvation Paul was a man of prestige—he was highly educated, a leader among the Jews, and a Pharisee. His lofty position, though, did not enable him to believe the gospel of salvation and all the things that Christ would reveal to him. Just like all other believers, Paul believed the truth of God because the Holy Spirit enabled him to do so. Furthermore, he admitted that everything he had going for him prior to his salvation was worthless compared to what he gained in Christ (Philippians 3:4-11). So, whether we are considered to be lowly or prestigious in this world, we have no room to boast in our knowledge or wisdom of the things of God because our salvation is by the grace of God—His gift to us—and our understanding is through the Holy Spirit instead of our own wisdom (Ephesians 1:15-21). The only boasting we should do, therefore, is in God and our Lord Jesus Christ for what they have done (I Corinthians 1:30-31; II Corinthians 10:17-18).

> **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Mystery of the Gospel (and the Mystery of the Faith)

> **With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my** [*Paul's*] **behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.** (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Paul referred to his message as the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), which was in accordance with the revelation of the mystery. This gospel, which he called *my gospel* because he was chosen by God to

[8] The Law remained in effect for a time after Paul's salvation among the remaining kingdom believers (Acts 21:17-20) because keeping the Law of Moses was part of the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 23:1-3; 28:19-20).

[9] Not everyone is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, which is why not everyone believes the truth of salvation. Brethren, God is sovereign, and it is He who chooses us, instead of us choosing Him (Ephesians 1:3-6; II Thessalonians 2:13; Galatians 4:9; John 1:12-13; 5:21; 6:37, 44; Romans 9:14-24); otherwise, no one would be saved. In our natural unsaved condition, we are not only enemies of God, but we are dead in sin (Romans 5:6-10; Ephesians 2:1-3)—those who are dead cannot choose life. Furthermore, by only having the spirit of man in us prior to salvation, by nature we are unable to understand or choose the things of God—*free will* chooses only according to that sinful nature. Salvation is truly by the grace of God, for which we ought to be thankful and for which there is no room for boasting. Please think on these things. See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** for more on this subject.

dispense it to mankind (Romans 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; Ephesians 1:1; 3:1-7), included not only the gospel of salvation but also all aspects of the mystery.[10] It differed greatly from the gospel of the kingdom preached by John the Baptist, Jesus while He was on earth, and the twelve apostles (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14).

> **Now to Him** [*God*] **who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past** [since the world began]**.** (Romans 16:25)

> **Of this church I** [*Paul*] **was made a minister according to the stewardship** [dispensation] **from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of** [fulfill] **the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1:25-27)

The good news of the kingdom was that Israel's long-promised heavenly kingdom on earth was at hand, or imminent. All Israel had to do was repent for their disobedience to God and be baptized for the remissions of their sins, and to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah and Son of God (Matthew 3:1-2; 10:5-7; 16:15-16; 28:19-20; Mark 16:16). As evidence of their faith, the believers were to obey the Law of Moses (Matthew 23:1-3) and sell all their possessions (Matthew 19:21; Acts 2:44-45). Salvation, therefore, was obtained through a combination of faith *plus* works. Although some believed, the people of Israel demanded that Jesus be crucified. Consequently, at Pentecost, there was no good news of salvation. Instead, Peter accused the people of Israel of killing their Messiah and it was for this reason (as well as their disobedience to God in general) that they needed to repent before Christ would return to establish His kingdom on earth (Acts 2:22-23, 36-38; 3:19-26).

Through Paul, God revealed His gospel of grace. During this time, referred to as the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:2), we have a relationship with God through the merits of Christ's work at the cross. We are no longer under the judicial administration of the Law of Moses—we were condemned by its righteous requirement, so it was nailed to the cross with Christ (Romans 6:14; II Corinthians 3:6; Galatians 3:11-13; Colossians 2: 13-14). Furthermore, we (Jews and Gentiles without distinction) are not accused of being guilty of crucifying Christ; instead, His death, burial, and resurrection are presented as good news. Today, therefore, salvation is by the grace of God through faith *apart* from any works of righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9). Do you think that Satan would have been so anxious to have Jesus killed if he had known that His work at the cross would have resulted in victory over sin and death—and his ultimate demise (I Corinthians 15:55-57; Revelation 20:10), and righteousness for all who believe (Romans 5:17-21; II Corinthians 5:21)?

Apostle Paul testified of the gospel of the grace of God but also called it the gospel of God (Romans 1:1; II Corinthians 11:7), and much more often referred to it as the gospel of Christ (e.g., Romans 1:9; 15:19; I Corinthians 9:12; II Corinthians 2:12). Paul's references to the gospel of the glory of Christ (II Corinthians 4:4) and the gospel of the uncircumcision (Galatians 2:7) are other descriptive names of the gospel of grace. The gospel of peace (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15) is yet another name for the gospel of grace.[11] The good news

[10] Paul's overall message was *the mystery*, which included *the gospel of the grace of God*. Additionally, the gospel of the grace of God included *the gospel of salvation* through Christ. These components were based on, and completely inter-twined by, the redemptive work of Christ at the cross according to God's eternal purpose.

[11] See my study **Which Gospel?** for a fuller explanation of the gospel of the grace of God.

of Paul's message had been hidden in God and has no connection with the gospel of Israel's promised kingdom.[12]

Paul also mentions the *mystery of the faith*. This appears to be associated with the mystery of the gospel, because the gospel of the grace of God encompasses or describes what Paul refers to as *the faith* (Romans 1:5; 10:8-10; Galatians 1:22-23; 6:10; Ephesians 4:5, 13; I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 4:7). God bridged the righteous gap between Himself and us based on Christ's faithfulness[13] (His work at the cross). On a personal level, we cannot obtain the blessings of Christ's work for us without faith (belief) in the gospel of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-9).

> **Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.** (I Timothy 3:8-9)

The Mystery of Israel's Blindness

> **For I** [*Paul*] **do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening** [blindness] **has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.** (Romans 11:25)

Because of the exceeding sinfulness of the nations, God raised up a nation to Himself through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who was also called Israel). Although living as slaves in Egypt, God brought His people of Israel out of Egypt through many miracles wrought by the hand of His servant Moses. Later, while in the wilderness, through Moses He gave His law and ordinances (later called the Law of Moses in Scripture) to the people. Then, He gave the people their own land that He had promised to them. God provided prophets to the people to hold them accountable to the Law and to reveal His future plans for the nation. God then sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah (His Son Jesus Christ) to His people, and finally the witness of His Holy Spirit (beginning at Pentecost) to testify of God's power. What was Israel's response to all these blessings from God?

Stephen, a disciple who had been falsely accused of preaching against the Law of Moses, was brought before the High Priest and members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (religious council) to explain and defend himself. Speaking under the control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10, 15), Stephen proceeded to provide the council with a brief but convicting history of Israel beginning with Abraham (Acts 7). Stephen accused Israel of rejecting the Law of Moses, killing God's prophets, and murdering Christ, the prophesied *Righteous One* (Acts 7:52-53). The council became very mad at Stephen for saying these things but reached a breaking point when he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and said that he saw the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:54-56). They then took Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death. In this account, therefore, we see that the nation of Israel rejected God the Father by killing His prophets, God the Son by crucifying Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit by stoning Stephen.

According to the Old Testament prophecies, what should have happened next? Israel's rejection of God was foretold by the prophets, which was to be followed by God's cleansing of Israel (judgment followed by redemption), Satan's world rule through his representatives (referred to as *the beast* and *the false prophet*),

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[12] Paul never preached the gospel of the kingdom. However, he explained why God interrupted His prophetic plan for Israel in Romans 9 – 11.

[13] Where most translations say "faith *in* Christ" in Romans 3:22, Galatians 2:16 and 20, Galatians 3:22-25, Ephesians 3:12, and Philippians 3:9, these passages appear to be speaking of the faith *of* Christ, referring to His faithfulness to God by performing His work at the cross for us instead of our faith in that work. In these instances, the KJV appears to be the correct rendering.

God's judgments on the nations and the earth, Christ's triumphant return to earth at the end of *the great tribulation*, and the establishment of God's heavenly kingdom on earth with Christ as King (Acts 2:14-21; Zechariah 13:1 – 14:21). However, none of this has happened yet. Why? When will the prophetic program resume? It will resume when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, which will be addressed later in this study.

Instead of judging Israel and the nations, God revealed His secret plan about Christ's work at the cross and ushered in His dispensation of grace through Apostle Paul. The prophetic program was interrupted and is still waiting to resume in due time. Concurrently with the revelation of the mystery, God temporarily blinded (hardened) the nation and set it aside. This act of grace is to the benefit of the Gentiles and Jews of this dispensation. Even though the nation of Israel is blinded to the truths of God, there is no longer any spiritual difference between Jews and Gentiles, so individual Jews and Gentiles have equal access to God and become equal members of the body of Christ if they believe the gospel of salvation.

Ushering in the dispensation of grace with the salvation of Paul (which followed not long after the stoning of Stephen[14]) would seem to be the time that God effectively blinded Israel and set the nation aside. However, we see in the book of Acts that Paul preached in synagogues in Gentile cities, and that the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem were still zealous for keeping the Law of Moses for some time after Paul's salvation and his ministry had begun (Acts 21:17-21). Perhaps to avoid future speculation that the Jews residing outside of Israel might not have had a fair chance to believe that Jesus was their promised Messiah, God used Paul to deliver the message to them.

Because of Paul's intense desire for his fellow countrymen to be saved (Romans 9:1-5), combined with the revelation of God's hidden plan, it was Paul's custom to teach at the local synagogues first as he entered each Gentile city (Acts 17:1-3). Although some Jews believed Paul's message about who Christ was (which he could do by referencing the Law of Moses and the Prophets) and about God's grace, including leaders of at least one synagogue (Acts 18:8), the congregations as a whole rejected Paul's message. Consequently, he frustratingly proclaimed that, because of their unbelief, the word of God was going to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:23-28). Paul may not have been fully aware at the time how God was using him to fulfill His plan to set Israel aside (perhaps he was, however).

> **Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you** [*Jews*] **first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."** (Acts 13:46)

Scripture does not say exactly when God fully set Israel aside, so it must not be important for us to know. The record in Acts (see also Galatians 2:1-9) demonstrates, however, an overlapping period of time where the gospel of the kingdom (also called the gospel of the circumcision[15]) continued to be preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and surrounding areas by the twelve apostles and other kingdom disciples at the same time that

[14] Paul, known as Saul at the time, was at least an active witness to the stoning of Steven and, therefore, most likely witnessed Stephen's defense. We do not know if he actually threw stones (it does not matter), but we do know that he was in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death (Acts 7:58; 8:1).

[15] Most Bible versions say, "the gospel *to* the uncircumcision [*Gentiles*]" and "gospel *to* the circumcision [*Jews*]" in Galatians 2:7. This translation implies that the same gospel was preached to both the Gentiles and the Jews. However, Paul was entrusted with the gospel of the grace of God to Jews and Gentiles without distinction in the Gentile nations (as God's appointed apostle of the Gentiles—Romans 11:13) while Peter was entrusted with the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews in Israel (see Matthew 16:17-19)—the two gospels are not the same. Therefore, the KJV translation of "the gospel *of* the uncircumcision" and "the gospel *of* the circumcision" correctly fits the context.

Paul and his coworkers were teaching the gospel of the grace of God (also called the gospel of the uncircumcision) in the Gentile cities and nations.

Many Christian denominations and individual believers have exhibited contempt for Jews, and some share responsibility for the terrible persecution of Jews over the last two millennia.[16] This is utterly wrong and most definitely contrary to the will of God. Paul explained to the believers in Rome (and, by extension, all members of the body of Christ), that God has not permanently cast aside the people of Israel—they were His chosen nation and God will fulfill all His promises to them (Romans 11:1-2, 11-12, 26-29). The nation was hardened because of its unbelief, but God will restore the nation to Himself. Furthermore, there is no room for boasting by believers today because we were adopted as children of God, whereas the believers of Israel were children of God before us (Romans 8:14-17; 11:15-18). In fact, it was through the nation's disbelief that we have received the gospel of grace and are reconciled to God (Romans 11:11-12). We are warned, however, that we can fall into disobedience as easily as Israel did (Romans 11:19-22). In other words, we should be careful how we stand for God and our Lord Jesus Christ lest we, too, should fall.

For some clarification, Israel was already blind to the truth of God when Jesus ministered to the nation. This condition was prophesied (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:37-40). However, in accordance with prophecy, Israel will subsequently return to God and be restored. Through all this God was, and in the future will be, dealing directly with His nation of Israel. Even when Israel was prophetically blind, however, some individuals did see the truth by the grace of God (Matthew 13:16-17) and the nation was exhorted to repent and turn to God.

The mystery of Israel's blindness or hardening, however, has to do with interrupting the prophetic progression of events so that God could reveal His hidden plan for the Gentiles completely apart from the blessings of Israel. The opportunity for Israel to turn to God is no longer available or possible during this dispensation of grace. The promises regarding Israel's restoration as God's people will occur after this dispensation is fulfilled (Romans 11:25-29). The role of Israel today in God's prophetic plan will be addressed later in this study.

Although there are no types (figurative or foreshadowing examples) of the church (the body of Christ) in the Old Testament because God kept it a secret, there certainly are parallels between Israel and the church. We seem to be no less obstinate and disobedient than Israel was. Paul's letters to the Corinthian and the Galatian brethren confirm this (I Corinthians 3:1-3; Galatians 3:1-3), as do the actions of many denominations and believers today. We are told that Israel's sinful behavior and disobedience is an example so that we would avoid such things and, instead, live in obedience to God (I Corinthians 10:1-12). You are encouraged to prayerfully read Romans chapters 9 through 11 to gain a greater understanding of the setting aside of Israel and the resulting benefit to us.

The Mystery of Being Caught Up and Changed (the Rapture)

> **Behold, I** [*Paul*] **tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep** [*physically die*]**, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** (I Corinthians 15:51-52)
>
> **But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep** [*physically dead*]**, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and**

[16] History suggests or supports that this persecution is a result of "Christianity" blaming the Jews for killing Jesus. Although God holds Israel responsible for killing its Messiah, the Roman authorities actually carried it out. Consequently, the Gentiles were complicit in Israel's sin and are in no position to judge the Jews (Acts 4:27).

rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (I Thessalonians 4:13-17)

Did you know that there are two returns of Christ spoken of in Scripture? One is in accordance with God's prophetic plan, and the other is in accordance with His secret (hidden) plan—the mystery. There are parallels between both returns, but each return is for a significantly different purpose.

There is much confusion among Christian denominations and individual believers about the *second coming of Christ*. Most think of the second coming as Jesus' physical return to earth as He spoke about while He was on earth and as explained in the book of Revelation. The coming of the *Son of Man* to render judgment at the end of the great tribulation was revealed by the Old Testament prophets (Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 14:4). Jesus spoke of His return in veiled terms to His disciples who, based on their actions after the crucifixion, did not understand what Jesus was saying until He opened their eyes to understanding after He rose from the dead (Matthew 16:27-28; 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28; 24:25-27, 44-45). Two angels of God confirmed this to the disciples at Christ's ascension (Acts 1:9-11), as did Peter to the people of Israel after Pentecost (Acts 3:19-21).

Some key points to know concerning the prophesied second coming of Christ is that He will return in power to defeat the enemies of God and of Israel (Zechariah 12:8-9; Revelation 14:14-20; 19:11-16), He will set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11-12), and He will establish His kingdom on earth. Christ will rule from new Jerusalem as King of His people Israel and as the King of kings of the earth, and the resurrected twelve apostles (not including Paul) will sit on the twelve thrones of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Ezekiel 37: 24-28; Revelation 21:1-27). Furthermore, of significant importance, the believers who survive the great tribulation and enter into the kingdom, as well as the resurrected believers who had died with this kingdom hope (all believers since Adam other than the members of the body of Christ saved during this dispensation of grace) will have bodies of flesh (Isaiah 65:17-25; Ezekiel 36:25-26; Luke 24:36-43). They will have one nature that is sinless and is fully obedient to God's laws and ordinances—the Law of Moses will be written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-28).

The mystery regarding Christ's return revealed by Paul, however, has nothing to do with the prophetic second coming of Christ. This aspect of the mystery, commonly referred to as *the rapture* (it is not called as such in Scripture), has been debated at length among Christian denominations and brethren for some time. The debate has included who will be raptured, when it will occur (pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation), and whether it will happen at all. These questions arise because most believers do not recognize the importance and distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship and message—he was chosen by God to dispense the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of grace. They do not realize that the rapture was only spoken of by Paul in his letters because it was a part of God's hidden plan (the mystery) until revealed through Paul—no other books of the Bible describe, refer to, or even hint at the rapture.

So, what did Paul say about this event?

- His letters describing the event were written to members of the body of Christ, that is, believers in this dispensation of grace. His letters were not written directly to believers of Israel (those saved under the gospel of the kingdom) who had, and will have, an earthly kingdom hope.
- Believers who are alive at the time of the rapture will be instantly changed. Their bodies will be changed from flesh and blood to spiritual bodies (I Corinthians 15:51-53). Believers of this

dispensation of grace who died prior to the rapture will be resurrected with spiritual bodies (I Corinthians 15:35-50). Our bodies will be transformed to conform with the body of Christ's glory (Philippians 3:20-21). Compare this to the kingdom believers who will have bodies of flesh and blood as previously noted.

- All believers of this dispensation of grace are already citizens of heaven because we are seated in Christ who is presently at the right hand of God. We will fully attain our position in the heavenly places in Christ upon death or the rapture (Philippians 3:20-21).
- Believers caught up at the rapture will meet the Lord *in the air* (I Thessalonians 4:15-17). Paul does not say that we will come right back down to the earth. He never speaks of members of the body of Christ as going through the time of great tribulation or being on earth as part of Israel's promised kingdom during Christ's 1,000-year reign.
- Paul refers to this event as our blessed hope (Titus 2:11-13). We should look forward to it with certainty and comfort (I Thessalonians 4:18).
- Paul says that we (members of the body of Christ) are not destined for wrath (I Thessalonians 5:4-11). This time of wrath refers to God's judgments on the nations and the earth during the time of great tribulation (Matthew 24:21-24; Daniel 9:27; Revelation 13:1-8). It may also include the time of God's judgments on the nation of Israel during the resumption of the prophesied *last days* following the rapture (Zechariah 13:7-9; Ezekiel 36:24-25).
- The rapture will occur at the close of this dispensation of grace, at which time the prophesied last days will resume. Scripture does not say when this will happen, but Paul describes the declining nature of mankind during the last days of this dispensation (I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4). These conditions, as bad as they are, have no relation to the events described by the Prophets and in the book of Revelation. However, the nature of mankind described by Paul was already prevalent in his day, so it can be truthfully said that the rapture has been imminent since it was revealed by Paul. In other words, no prophesied events must occur before the rapture occurs—it could happen any day.
- God will announce the descending of Christ out of heaven to gather (catch) up the members of His body with the voice of God's archangel and the sound of the trumpet of God (I Thessalonians 4:16). Similarly, God will sound a trumpet to send out His angels to gather His chosen ones scattered throughout the land when Christ returns in power and glory at the close of the great tribulation (Matthew 24:3, 29-31). These are two separate events (the first associated with the mystery and the second with prophecy), but neither of these soundings of the trumpet are related to the seven trumpets of the seven angels described in the book of Revelation. Although it is conjecture, it is possible that the voice and trumpet announcing the rapture will be heard only by believers because the world during this dispensation is blinded (and deaf?) to the truth of God (Romans 8:7; I Corinthians 2:14).

In summary, the event we call the rapture was spoken of only by Paul because it was part of God's mystery. It will involve only the members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace. Believers who are alive at the time of the rapture, and the resurrected bodies of those who died beforehand, will be changed to have spiritual bodies so that we can reside in the heavenly places. The rapture will occur at the close of this dispensation of grace, at which time the prophesied last days and all the events associated with them will resume.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:11-13)

The Mystery of Lawlessness

> **For the mystery of lawlessness** [iniquity] **is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.** (II Thessalonians 2:7)

False teachers had tried to deceive the Thessalonian believers by saying that the rapture had already occurred (II Thessalonians 2:1-4). So, Paul briefly summarized what he had explained to them in person about the sequence of coming events (II Thessalonians 2:5-12). Basically, he said that if the rapture had occurred, then the lawless one (the beast) would already be working in their midst, which was not the case. However, he did say that the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. In what way was it already at work?

Although the beast and the false prophet (an antichrist—I John 2:22; II John 1:7) will not be revealed until the last seven years prior to Christ's return to earth, Satan is at work in the world today. Despite this age being the dispensation of God's grace, it is also an evil age (Galatians 1:3-4). Satan and his angels are working in the earthly and heavenly realms in an attempt to thwart God and His people (Ephesians 2:1-3; 6:10-12). Many temptations are thrown before us, even from people who have the appearance of righteousness, to turn us away from our fellowship with God and our service to Him. Satan is currently working in a subtle or veiled manner by imitating God (II Corinthians 11:12-15), whereas during the prophesied last days he will be working more openly, prowling about like a roaring lion (I Peter 5:8). However, we need to remember that, because we are in Christ, no temptation is too great to deal with, and nothing can separate us from the love of God (I Corinthians 10:13; Romans 8:31-39). Furthermore, we need to remember that we have the strength of God within us to resist Satan and his schemes against us (Ephesians 3:14-19; 6:10-17; Colossians 1:9-12).

> **And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air** [*Satan*]**, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.** (Ephesians 2:1-3)

> **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Despite the working of Satan today, the scope of his power is restrained or bridled. Restrained by what or whom? II Thessalonians 2:7 appears to be referring to the restraining work of the Holy Spirit. Sometime after the rapture God will remove the restraints holding Satan back (God apparently will take the Holy Spirit out of Satan's way) and he will unleash his evil through the prophesied beast and false prophet. Satan will then be defeated by Christ and thrown into the abyss (bottomless pit) for 1,000 years before being released and subsequently destroyed forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:1-3; 7-10).

The Mystery of Godliness

> **But in case I** [*Paul*] **am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.** (I Timothy 3:15-16)

Lawlessness is at work today through the influence of Satan, but so is godliness in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ through the members of His body the church. The person, work, and righteousness of Christ—His godliness—is the subject of this mystery. We cannot live godly lives apart from His godliness. Christ was declared by God to be His Son at His baptism by John (Matthew 3:13-17; John 1:31). Through Paul, we know that Christ was demonstrated to be the Son of God through His resurrection (Romans 1:3-4). Christ had given up His position in heaven to become a man, and He humbled Himself in obedience before the Father by dying for our sins—He died in our place (Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 3:21-26). Not only did Jesus the man represent the complete Godhead (Colossians 2:9-10; John 10:30; 14:8-10), but through the power of His resurrection we are complete in Him—we are counted as righteous because of His righteousness (Romans 4:22-25; 5:17-21). This fact had not been revealed before Paul.

Brethren, we need to remember that before we were saved, we lived according to our inherited sin nature in a life separated from God—we were ungodly (Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 2:1-3). We were actually enemies of God (Romans 5:10). Thankfully, however, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6). Christ died for our sins and, if we believe that, our sins are forgiven (past, present, and future). Does that give us a license to sin? Can we live however we want, as if we were godless, because we are forgiven? No! By doing so completely disregards what Christ did for us at the cross—we become self-centered hypocrites.

> **What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?** (Romans 6:1-2)

> **Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, for the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.** (Romans 6:8-13)

It is the power of His resurrection that put Christ above all things and enabled us to be saved and enables us to live godly lives (Ephesians 1:18-23). In this dispensation of grace, we are in Christ and Christ is in us, and the Holy Spirit of God indwells us (Romans 8:1, 9-11). Because of what Christ did for us at the cross, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Is not this something to be truly thankful for? How, then, do we demonstrate our thanks to God and our Lord Jesus Christ? We are exhorted (and have the ability because of the Holy Spirit in us) to live godly lives. We are God's instruments to demonstrate His godliness in this godless world.

> **For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.** (Titus 2:11-12)

> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.** (II Corinthians 5:20)

The Mystery of God's Will (the Fullness of Times)

> **He** [*God*] **made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him** [Himself] **with a view to an administration** [dispensation] **suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth…** (Ephesians 1:9-10)

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep [*physically dead*]**. For since by a man** [*Adam*] **came death, by a man** [*Christ*] **also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He** [*Christ*] **hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He** [*God*] **has put all things in subjection under His** [*Christ's*] **feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He** [*God*] **is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him** [*Christ*]**. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.** (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

The mystery of God's will, which covers the dispensation of the fullness of the times (hereafter referred to as *the fullness of times* as translated in the KJV), very briefly describes the last dispensation in God's eternal plan. God has revealed very little of this time in His plan, but from the passages above we have the following concise summary of events that give us a timeline for when the fullness of times begins, which will continue forever:

- Christ will reign (His 1,000-year Messianic reign on earth) until God has put all His enemies under Christ's feet (I Corinthians 15:25)—they will be completely defeated (Revelation 20:7-10).
- The last enemy that will be abolished is death (I Corinthians 15:26), which occurs at the last judgment (at the great white throne) at the close of the 1,000-year Messianic kingdom (Revelation 20:11-15).
- After all rule, authority, and power (including death) have been abolished, Christ will hand the kingdom over to God the Father (I Corinthians 15:24)—this, apparently, is the beginning of the fullness of times.
- At that time all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, will be brought together (Ephesians 1:10).
- All of this was God's plan from the very beginning (Ephesians 1:9).

The information provided in these two passages cannot be found anywhere else in Scripture. God's prophetic plan ends with the judgments at the great white throne; what follows is part of the mystery that God had kept hidden in Himself. Many churches and brethren believe otherwise, thinking that the events recorded in Revelation 21 and 22 describe the time after the final judgments described in Revelation 20:11-15. However, the events of the last two chapters of Revelation do not chronologically follow those recorded in Revelation 20.

As we have seen in the above passages, the dispensation of the fullness of times will begin *after* all rule, authority, and power, including death, are abolished, which will occur at the great white throne judgments. The last two chapters of Revelation, however, describe Christ's Messianic kingdom (where Christ reigns as Israel's Messiah and King) that will occur *before* the final judgments. New Jerusalem—the bride of Christ—will descend out of heaven onto the earth after Christ's victory over the enemies of Israel (Revelation 21:2, 9-10). Christ will be the King, and the resurrected twelve apostles will sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). This will indeed be a time of a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1). The configuration of the surface of the earth as we know it will have changed during God's catastrophic judgments of the nations, nature, the earth, and the universe during the great tribulation (Revelation 6:12-17; 8:7-12; 9:13-18)—the reconfiguration will be necessary because there is no place today for new Jerusalem to fit (Revelation 21:15-16). The descent of new Jerusalem out of heaven will result in some type of

reconfiguration of heaven. Furthermore, Paradise (Abraham's bosom), a place somewhere in the heavenlies containing the souls of the kingdom believers, will be emptied as they are resurrected to live in new Jerusalem and reign with Christ as priests of God (Revelation 20:5-6; Exodus 19:5-6; Luke 14:14; John 5:28-29; 11:21-26).

Further evidence that the descent of new Jerusalem will occur before instead of after the final judgments is that the nations outside the city will walk by its light (the miraculous light of Christ), and that sin will continue outside the gates (Revelation 21:24-27; 22:14-15). Christ will reign as the King of kings, and the kings of the surviving nations will pay homage to Him. Those kings and their nations, however, will rise up and make war against Christ and the city at the end of the 1,000-year kingdom (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10), at which time they will be destroyed, and sin and death will be abolished (thrown into the lake of fire) for eternity.

Although usually taught otherwise, the church is not the bride of Christ spoken of in Revelation 21. Brethren, in this dispensation of grace we are members of the body of Christ—Christ is already in us and we are in Him. We cannot be both members of His body (which is masculine) and His future bride. The bride of Christ, furthermore, is explicitly described as *new Jerusalem*, a divine city with specific physical dimensions and contents (Revelation 21:9-21). Christ referred to this city during His ministry on earth (John 14:2). There is no mention of it being inhabited when it descends from heaven—that will not occur until the believers who survive the great tribulation and the resurrected kingdom believers occupy it. Furthermore, the church, which is the body of Christ, is part of the revelation of the mystery to Paul and is not part of God's prophetic program.

So, what will it be like during the dispensation of the fullness of times? Will heaven and earth always be separate? Will the believers of this dispensation reside in heaven forever? God did not reveal the specifics—we will find out when the time comes. God did reveal, however, that all things in Christ, both the things in the heavens and things on the earth, will be summed up or made one. Although Ezekiel spoke specifically of Israel and its promised kingdom, he said that the kingdom would be everlasting (Ezekiel 37:24-28); this was confirmed to Mary by the angel of God (Luke 1:32-33). However, prophecies only describe the first 1,000 years, and only Paul said that Christ will hand the kingdom over to God after the final judgments. Furthermore, remember that the dispensation of the fullness of times is part of the mystery. It is not unreasonable to think, therefore, that redeemed Israel (things on earth) and the body of Christ (things in heaven) will dwell as one on earth after sin and death are abolished. These thoughts are just for consideration; whatever happens, it will be in accordance with God's plan and will be perfect.

Resumption of God's Prophetic Plan

The revelation of the mystery, which we have seen was God's plan since before the world began, interrupted God's prophetic plan regarding Israel (a temporary interruption that continues to this day). When Peter was addressing the people of Israel who lived in or had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost, he and his fellow disciples spoke in a miraculous tongue that everyone—to their amazement—could understand in their own native language (Acts 2:4-12). Peter explained that what the people were witnessing was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophet Joel's prophecy concerning the last days (Acts 2:14-21). Fulfillment of this specific prophesy would begin with the believers of Israel being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, which was happening at that very moment. However, the rest of Joel's prophecy (and that of many other prophets) regarding God's judgments and Christ's return did not happen and have yet to happen. We can and should be thankful for the interruption of the prophetic plan because it was for our benefit. Instead of judging Israel and the nations in accordance with His prophetic plan, it was due time for God to reveal His eternal plan and purpose—His secret plan—based on the finished work of Christ at the cross.

Many brethren who correctly think that the rapture will occur before the great tribulation, also think that Christ will return to establish His kingdom seven years after the rapture. Some also logically assume, then,

that He will return less than seven years after the rapture because Peter said that fulfillment of Joel's account of the last days started at Pentecost and that the prophetic clock was interrupted some specific time shortly after Pentecost. What is generally not understood, however, is that the prophesied tribulation period is only one phase of the prophesied *last days*; that is, the beginning of fulfillment of Joel's prophecy did not represent the beginning of the tribulation period.

Prophetic Last Days

As a note of caution, one could spend a considerable amount of time trying to decipher all the references pertaining to the last days. However, it is doubtful that anyone will understand them all and figure out how they all interrelate in time until the prophecies are actually fulfilled. Furthermore, it is not important for us (members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace) to understand all the details because we will not be involved in the fulfillment of the prophetic last days. An attempt will be made, however, to provide some information for the purpose of distinguishing between prophecy and the mystery in a manner that Paul did for the Thessalonian brethren who were being confused and deceived by false teachers (I Thessalonians 5:1-11; II Thessalonians 2:1-12).

If one looks up Scripture references describing the last days, latter days, and similar time-descriptive terms, there is much more to the last days than a tribulation period. According to what has been revealed in Scripture, therefore, the prophesied last days include the following events (as well as many more not described here).

- Christ the Messiah will be born, will minister to Israel, will be crucified, and will be resurrected (Hebrews 1:1-3). Prophecies concerning these things have already been fulfilled as we know and as described in the section **Prophecy—Since the World Began**.
- The prophet Elijah will prepare the way for Israel's Messiah (Malachi 4:4-6). This was fulfilled through the ministry of John the Baptist.[17]
- The Holy Spirit will descend upon God's people as a witness to the power of God (Joel 2:28-29). This was fulfilled, at least partially, at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-17).
- Israel will be judged and redeemed by God. The timing and order of these restoration events are uncertain to me, but they, and the remaining events that follow, still await fulfillment.
    - Israel will be gathered into its promised land as God's chosen nation—the twelve tribes will be restored as one nation (Ezekiel 37:15-23; Micah 2:12-13). This event appears to be the beginning of the first phase of fulfillment of the kingdom promises sometime after the rapture.
    - The people of Israel will be judged for their disobedience to God, and the nation will be redeemed (Hosea 3:1-5; Amos 9:7-10; Micah 1:1-7). This cleansing will be severe—God will destroy two thirds of the people of Israel because of their unbelief (Zechariah13:8-9).
    - The believing remnant of Israel will mourn over killing their Messiah and will repent. They will be changed to have hearts of flesh (as opposed to having sinful hearts of stone) and will

[17] John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah, which is true because he was John, born of Zacharias and Elizabeth (John 1:21-25; Luke 1:5-17). However, Jesus said that John the Baptist was the prophet Elijah who was to come (Matthew 11:7-14; 17:9-13; Mark 1:2-4; Malachi 3:1). It appears, then, that the prophecy about Elijah was referring to John the Baptist instead of the man Elijah. This is similar to the prophecy concerning David sitting on the throne in the kingdom, which was actually referring to Christ and not to the man David—David was a type of Christ (Ezekiel 37:24). Furthermore, there is no mention of Elijah in the book of Revelation.

automatically obey the Law of Moses because it will be written on their hearts (Zechariah 12:10-14; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

- Satan will respond to Israel's reestablishment as God's chosen nation by revealing the beast (the fourth and most powerful king[18]) and the false prophet (Daniel 7:7-8, 19-20, 23-24; 9:26-27; Revelation 16:13). The introduction of the beast and false prophet will start the clock for the final seven-year prophetic period before Christ's return (Daniel 9:24-27).
- The prophesied great tribulation will occur, which will include Satan's persecution of Israel through his beast and false prophet (Daniel 8:23-26; Revelation 11:1-2; 12:13-17; 13:1-8), and God's judgments of the earth and its inhabitants (Jeremiah 30:23-24; Revelation 6:12-17; 8:7-12; 9:18). The first three and a half years of the beast's reign will be *relatively* peaceful—a false appearance of peace—because of his pact with the other nations (Revelation 13:1-6; Matthew 24:6-8).
- The great tribulation will be culminated by Christ's return and His victory over the nations led by the beast, commonly referred to as the battle of Armageddon (Daniel 7:22, 26; Revelation 16:13-16; Revelation 19:11-16, 19-21; Matthew 24:29-30; Acts 1:9-11).
- The beast and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity (Revelation 19:20), and Satan (*the dragon*) will be bound in the abyss (bottomless pit) for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).
- New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven as the bride of Christ onto a reconfigured earth, from where Christ will rule the earth as the King of kings (Revelation 21). This appears to be the beginning of the second phase of fulfillment of the kingdom promises.
- The prophesied first resurrection will occur, when the children of God (kingdom believers) since Adam will enter Israel's promised kingdom—new Jerusalem (Revelation 20:4-6; Ezekiel 37:11-14; John 6:39-44; 11:24). God's people who endure the great tribulation will also enter in (Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13). There will be no sin in new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:27).
- Christ will reign from new Jerusalem for 1,000 years and will be the light of the world (Revelation 20:4-6; 21:22-25). He will be the King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling with a rod of iron over the nations outside of new Jerusalem (the nonbelieving people who survive the great tribulation) because they will still be sinful (Psalm 2:6-9; Isaiah 2:1-4; Revelation 2:25-27; 12:5; 17:14; 19:15-16; 22:14-15). Even though Satan will have no influence over them (he will be in the bottomless pit), the people of the nations will continue to worship their own gods (Micah 4:1-6).
- After 1,000 years of Christ's reign, Satan will be released from the bottomless pit and will gather the nations for one last battle against Christ. Satan's army will be defeated by a fire from heaven and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10).
- After His enemies are destroyed, Christ will judge the nonbelieving dead of all ages (the second resurrection or resurrection of judgment—John 5:28-29; 12:48; Revelation 20:5) from a great white throne and will cast all of them, referred to as death and Hades, into the lake of fire for eternal judgment (Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 25:41-46).

Therefore, the prophesied last days encompass the period of time beginning with the birth of Christ and ending with the great white throne judgments. If Paul's letters (Romans through Philemon) and his salvation and ministry recorded in the book of Acts were removed from the Bible, then the entire New Testament would

[18] Three other kings will reign over the Gentile nations after the rapture (Daniel 7:1-27).

consist of the remaining details of the last days and their fulfillment (which would have been fulfilled by now).[19] We should be thankful that God interjected the dispensation of grace according to His eternal plan.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

Contrary to what is commonly believed by Christian denominations and many brethren, *none* of the prophesies regarding Israel has been fulfilled yet. Following the horrible holocaust during World War II, many of the surviving Jews resettled in a portion of the historical promised land, and the political State of Israel was founded through a war of independence in 1948 (instead of being gathered there by God). However, more Jews still live outside the nation than live within it. Israel was also established as a secular nation and continues to be so. Even Orthodox Judaism is a false religion just as it was during the time that Christ was on earth (Matthew 23:1-33). Religious Jews who hold to the Law of Moses continue to be hardened to the truth of God's word and a veil lies over their heart (II Corinthians 3:14-15). Therefore, the Israel of today is simply one of the nations in this dispensation of grace and is no different in God's eyes or in His dealings than any other nation. Efforts by many Christians to support Israel because they consider it to be God's nation and that by doing so are in accordance with prophecy are misguided. Brethren, Israel will not be reestablished as God's nation until sometime after the rapture.[20]

As mentioned earlier, false teachers had told the Thessalonian brethren that Christ's return in judgment was at hand (imminent), which would mean that the rapture would have already occurred or, possibly, that there would not even be a rapture as Paul described in his first letter to the Thessalonians. However, Paul very briefly reminded them that Christ's return would be preceded by a falling away (apostasy, or rebellion) followed by (or in conjunction with) the appearance of the lawless one or man of sin (the beast), which would signal the beginning of the tribulation period and would be the person of Satan whom Christ would destroy upon His physical return to earth (II Thessalonians 2:1-12). Paul was reassuring them that these things had not happened and, brethren, they still have not happened. We do not know the full scope of what Paul told the Thessalonian brethren in person about prophetic events following the rapture beyond what he wrote in I Thessalonians 5:1-7 and in II Thessalonians 2:1-12, but he did not go into much detail in his letters to them.

The period of time between the rapture and the great tribulation is unknown, but much has to happen before the beast begins waging war against Israel. Very briefly, the following events are some of which will occur, although not necessarily in this order and some will apparently overlap in time.

- The seven churches described in the first three chapters of Revelation will be established. Church scholars and historians have debated for many years when these churches have happened and which church represents today, or whether they represent actual churches at all. Whether they refer to actual churches in the designated Asian cities or are representative of various spiritual conditions among God's people, the book of Revelation opens by saying that the things John was witnessing about the revelation of Jesus Christ (as revealed to John through the angel of God) had not happened yet (Revelation 1:1-2). Additionally, because of the revelation of the mystery and

[19] All the books after Philemon were written to Israel in general, but more specifically to Jewish kingdom brethren. They explain the delay of the fulfillment of their kingdom promises (II Peter 3:3-10), how to live during the time up to and including the great tribulation, and how they will suffer persecution for the sake of Christ. Details of their lives during the first 1,000 years of the kingdom are mostly included in Old Testament prophecies and in the gospel accounts of Matthew through John.

[20] When the church, and the associated influence of the Holy Spirit in the world through us, is taken out of Satan's way at the rapture (II Thessalonians 2:7), the world will be dominated by the Gentiles under the influence of Satan. *Perhaps* this is the time of the fullness of the Gentiles, during which time also Israel's blindness will be lifted, and God will open the eyes of its people to the truth of Christ (Romans 11:25-27).

the interjection of the dispensation of grace, nothing spoken of or prophesied in the book of Revelation has occurred yet. We do not know exactly when these churches will be established, but they are Jewish churches with a kingdom hope (Revelation 1:6; Exodus 19:5-6; I Peter 2:9—Paul never refers to members of the body of Christ as a kingdom of priests). Therefore, they most likely did not coexist with churches of this dispensation of grace in cities outside of Israel where Jews and Gentiles were saved in accordance with the gospel of grace and were equal in the body of Christ. It is more likely that the establishment of these churches and the difficulties they will endure will occur sometime *after* the rapture and apparently will occur over an extended period of time.

- As previously described, Israel will be gathered from the nations into its former promised land. God will reunite Judea and Samaria (referred to as Judah and Israel in the Old Testament), bringing all the tribes together again.
- A *falling away* (as translated in the KJV in II Thessalonians 2:3) will occur at some point. Some brethren believe the Greek word *apostasia*[21] was mistranslated and that it refers to the rapture, or catching away of believers. However, II Thessalonians 2:6-7 says that Satan is being restrained now but lawlessness will follow when the Holy Spirit is taken out of his way. As presented in Matthew 24:9-12, it appears that Jesus was referring to this time when He warned His disciples of a time when many false prophets (antichrists) from the people of Israel (see also I John 2:18-19) will rise up and mislead many of the people of Israel, causing them to fall away from the truth. Concurrently, those who believe and stand for the truth of the gospel of the kingdom will suffer great persecution or tribulation. This time of tribulation experienced by God's people does not appear to be the same as the great tribulation that Jesus refers to regarding God's judgments of the nations after the appearance of the beast (Matthew 24:15-22).
- As already noted, God will cleanse His nation Israel through severe judgment. This will be done through God's angels and is not associated with His judgment of the nations during the great tribulation.
- God will raise up 144,000 virgin Jewish men (12,000 each from twelve tribes of Israel), apparently to be the witnesses of Christ to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the nations (Revelation 7:4-8; 14:1-5). Their ministry will fulfill *the great commission* (Matthew 24:14). Because Israel will be cleansed sometime after the rapture (consider that the secular State of Israel today does not have or recognize twelve tribes), it will take at least a generation for these men to be born and raised up in their respective tribes.

Fulfillment of the so-called great commission (it is not referred to as such in Scripture), given by our Lord Jesus Christ to His eleven disciples after He was raised from the dead (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8), began at Pentecost shortly after Christ's ascension into heaven (Acts 2:1-4). His disciples, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaimed Israel's guilt for crucifying Christ and the need for the people of Israel to repent (Acts 2:14-39). Although thousands believed Peter's message and repented, Jerusalem as a whole, as led by their spiritual leaders, continued to reject this message and persecuted the disciples (Acts 4:1-3; 13-22; 5:17-42; 7:54-60; 8:1-4).

Because the salvation of Jerusalem was to occur first (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:7-8), fulfillment of the great commission was interrupted by Israel's disbelief almost as soon as it started. Obedience to the commands included in the great commission will resume sometime after the rapture and it will be fulfilled by the time

[21] The only other use of this Greek word is in Acts 21:21, where it refers to forsaking or turning away from the Law of Moses.

Christ returns to earth. It is not God's plan or expectation that members of the body of Christ try to fulfill the great commission because we are no longer under the Law but under grace, and the gospel of the kingdom is not God's gospel for this dispensation. An honest evaluation of all the efforts today to fulfill the great commission will demonstrate that no one is actually obeying the commands or requirements included in the great commission.[22] However, thankfully by His sovereign power and grace, God is using these misguided efforts to save people throughout the world wherever the gospel of salvation is preached.[23]

Brethren, the prophetic events listed above will not start until an unspecified time after the rapture and will take some time to be fulfilled. Remember that Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, or about two generations, before entering their promised land. It could easily be two or more generations between the rapture and the appearance of the beast, but this is speculation that serves no benefit other than to demonstrate that it will be more than seven years between the rapture and the prophesied second coming of Christ. As this study focuses on the mystery and is not intended to be a study of prophecy, it is left to you to explore post-rapture prophetic events. If you do this from a dispensational perspective and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 1:15-23), keeping the mystery in mind, you will be far wiser than most Bible scholars and theologians.

The Importance of Understanding the Mystery

The mystery is not something new—Paul taught it nearly 2,000 years ago and it is revealed in every Bible translation that we have. However, the revelation of the mystery is not a part of any denominational doctrine and very few churches teach it. Why is this the case?

During Paul's ministry, which was personally commissioned by the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, nonbelieving Jews and false brethren followed Paul around to discredit his teaching and successfully convinced some churches that he established to turn away from the truth (Acts 13:49-50; 14:1-7, 19; 15:1-2; 17:10-13; Galatians 1:6-9; 2:4; 3:1-3; II Timothy 4:14-15). Today, the importance of Paul's apostleship and message is generally unknown by most brethren and is often rejected by brethren who are exposed to it. Many aspects of the mystery and the gospel of grace of God are contrary to traditional Bible teaching, so people, being easily tied to or swayed by church doctrine or tradition, react negatively to it (Colossians 2:16-19).

Unfortunately, most believers have come to believe that we should be following in the footsteps of Jesus, not realizing that in His human form He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6;

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[22] Christ told His disciples to teach people to observe all that He had commanded His disciples to do (Matthew 28:20; John 14:15). His commandments included: preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 23; 10:7) and repentance and water baptism for the remission of sins (Matthew 4:17; 28:19; Mark 16:16); obeying the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-20; 23:1-3); selling their possessions (Matthew 19:16-22); not taking any money or extra clothes with them because they would be provided for wherever they went (Matthew 10:9-10); remitting or retaining the sins of those they preached to (John 20:21-23) and judging individuals and cities that reject their message (Matthew 10:11-15); and casting out demons, speaking in new tongues, healing the sick, and raising the dead (Matthew 10:7-8; Mark 16:17-18). Associated promises included receiving what they asked or prayed for (Matthew 7:7-8; 21:21-22; John 14:12-14) and that the Holy Spirit would speak through them when they had to defend the gospel (Matthew 10:16-20). Brethren, none of these things apply to us in this dispensation of grace, and we are disobeying God when we try to do or claim them.

[23] Few missionaries understand the distinctiveness and scope of the gospel of grace as demonstrated by their desire to preach the gospel of the kingdom as Jesus did and to fulfill the great commission. However, many missionaries do understand the gospel of salvation as presented through Paul (I Corinthians 15:1-4), even if they do not refer to it as such or if they add water baptism or other unnecessary requirements. These missionaries are being used and blessed by God in ways beyond their understanding, and many suffer for the sake of Christ.

15:24; Acts 5:29-31), and that no one is actually obeying most of His commands (because we are not supposed to and we cannot do so). Perhaps it is easier to relate to an infant or a man; however, we are supposed to know our Savior as the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:14-16). Paul's warning to Timothy, although already true in his day, has certainly come to fruition: believers accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires rather than in accordance with the truth (II Timothy 4:3-4).

Why is understanding the mystery, and its differences from prophecy, important? Is this just knowledge for the sake of knowledge? Or is this something that God truly wants us to know and incorporate into our daily lives? Brethren, the revelation of the mystery through Paul explains the full purpose of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as God's eternal plan. Furthermore, it explains the many *apparent* contradictions in the Bible, some of which are addressed as follows:

- Did Christ come only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24), or did He come to die for everyone's sin without distinction (Romans 3:21-26; 10:12)?
- Are we to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins to be saved (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:37-38), or are we to simply believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14)?
- Are we to present the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to the Jews first, beginning with Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and then the rest of the world (Luke 24:45-47; Acts 1:8), or are we to preach the gospel of the grace of God to everyone without distinction (Acts 20:24; Romans 16:25-26)?
- Are we to expect to get what we pray for (Matthew 21:21-22), or are we to expect the peace of God that passes all understanding, realizing that we do not even know how to pray as we should (Philippians 4:6-7; Romans 8:26-28)?
- Are we to obey the Law of Moses (Matthew 23:1-3; Acts 21:20), or are we to realize that the Law was nailed to the cross and that we are not under the Law but under the grace of God (Colossians 2:13-14; Romans 6:14)?
- Are we to sell all our possessions so that all believers have everything in common (Matthew 19:16-22; Acts 2:43-45), or are we to work with our own hands and take care of our own family (I Thessalonians 4:9-12; I Timothy 5:8)?
- Are we to claim and exhibit the power of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, healing the sick, and raising the dead (Matthew 10:7-8; Mark 16:17-18), or are we to be filled with the Holy Spirit and walk worthy of our salvation, knowing that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are not available to us in this dispensation of grace (Ephesians 5:15-18; Colossians 1:9-10; I Corinthians 13:8-13)?
- Are we to obey and fulfill the great commission with all its commands (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18), or are we to live for Christ and represent Him as His ambassadors on earth (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:12-17; II Corinthians 5:20-21)?
- Do the people of Israel (Jews) have preeminence in God's plan today (Acts 3:19-26), or is God dealing with everyone on an equal basis—equally sinful and lost (Romans 3:9-12, 21-23)?
- Are we to look forward to being resurrected at the end of the great tribulation to enter Christ's prophesied heavenly kingdom on earth (John 6:39-44; Revelation 20:6), or are we to look forward to being resurrected or caught up to meet our Lord in the air before resumption of the prophesied last days (I Thessalonians 4:13-18)?
- Are we to look forward to having perfect bodies of flesh and blood (Isaiah 65:17-25; Ezekiel 36:25-26), or are we to look forward to having our bodies changed from physical to spiritual bodies to reside with Christ in the heavenly places (I Corinthians 15:50-53)?

- When we die, will our souls go to Paradise (Abraham's bosom) to await resurrection into the kingdom on earth (Luke 16:22-23; 23:39-43), or do we go to heaven where we are already citizens (Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:4-6)?

Does the list of truths above show contradictions in Scripture? No. Instead, they show the progressive revelation of God's eternal plan for His people. In every point, both statements are Scriptural and true; however, only the second statement applies to us in this dispensation of grace.[24] We know that we are not supposed to sacrifice animals to cover or atone for our sins, but that was absolutely required by God in the past. We now know that Christ's sacrificial work at the cross provided God's full righteous requirement for the payment of our sins and that He reconciles us to Himself upon belief in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for us. However, this truth was not revealed to us until our Lord Jesus Christ revealed the mystery to Paul.

Too often these differences are explained away or simply not addressed in churches today. By doing so, the truth and power of Scripture—the word of God—is watered down and understanding is relegated to opinion. That is why we have so many Christian denominations today. The Bible is the word of God, and it provides *everything* we need to know to live as God wants us to live. However, God expects us to rightly divide, or accurately handle, the word of truth to understand which commands and promises apply to whom. We are warned not to mix gospels or disregard or alter the truth revealed to us through Paul (Galatians 1:8; Romans 16:17-18; I Corinthians 3:10-11; II Thessalonians 2:15; 3:14-15; II Timothy 1:13-14; 4:1-4). Understanding the mystery as our Lord revealed it to Apostle Paul truly is the key to understanding Scripture.

> **Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling** [rightly dividing] **the word of truth.** (II Timothy 2:15)
>
> **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching** [doctrine]**, for reproof, for correction, for training** [instruction] **in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate** [*complete and proficient*]**, equipped for every good work.** (II Timothy 3:16-17)

[24] See my studies **Which Gospel?** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** for more explanation on the differences between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God.