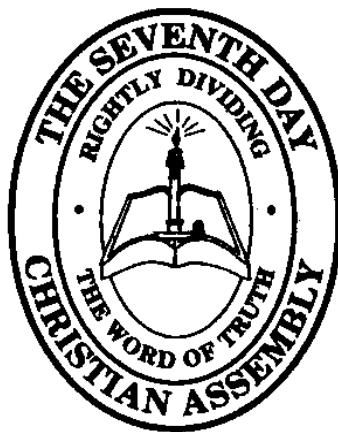


Meat in Due Season:

**PRACTICAL LESSONS IN
GOD'S TRUTH**
(Psalm 104:27)

Larry E. Ford

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-Foreword-

In the movie *A Few Good Men*, Tom Cruise plays the part of a prosecutor in a military court. Jack Nicholson is an officer who is called in to testify about some illegal activities involving his men. Because Jack is not cooperating with Tom's efforts to get the information he needs for his case, Tom shouts at Jack that he wants the *truth*; whereupon, Jack screams back, “***You can't handle the truth!***”

This defining moment in the movie frames a quandary for those who, like Tom Cruise’s character, demand to be told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. A quandary puts one into a state of uncertainty. It is when we are faced with the *truth* of God’s word that we discover whether or not we can *handle the truth* or have to live in a quandary. John 8:31, 32 says: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the *truth*, and the *truth* shall set you free” (emphasis added). Jesus’ point is rather blunt and straightforward: If you obey the truth of God’s word when you discover it, then and only then will you be His *true* disciple. The result will be the knowledge of the truth, which will set you free. Free from what? Falsehoods? Sin? The world?

In this situation, you are confronted with a most important question: Are you prepared to live in the freedom brought by knowing and obeying God’s truth? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: “He who truly believes, truly obeys; he who truly obeys, truly believes.” If you are determined to know God’s truth, then

God is determined to give you every opportunity to obey and be free. *Can you handle that?* If you can, then you will be free. If you cannot, then you will be a person without the knowledge of God's truth. This is a challenge that ultimately confronts all of us throughout our lives – a challenge we cannot afford to refuse to accept.

A Primer in the Truth

Notice this very important lesson from Jesus Christ to the Samaritan woman at the well: "...*True* worshipers will worship God in *spirit* and *truth*, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is a spirit, and **His worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth**" (John 4:23,24; emphases added). John 14:26 and 15:26 tell us in the words of Jesus Christ that the purpose of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to teach us what Jesus commands us to do and to be a guide to God's truth as it is revealed through His Christ.

Jesus prayed to God the Father just before His crucifixion. In that prayer, He made an astounding request: "Sanctify them [my disciples] **by the truth; your word is truth**" (John 17:17; emphases added). This word *sanctify* does not mean that Jesus asked the Father only to separate His disciples from the sinfulness of the world. It means that He requested the Father to help them to build **dedication** for their service to God and to be **fully, spiritually equipped** to carry out that service. Ultimately, it means that He would enable His disciples **to make the sacrifices required** of them for serving God properly in the truth. The disciples of Jesus Christ will go to God's word and learn the truth by which this will be fulfilled. The point is simple: finding God's truth and living by God's truth is the primary goal of those who want to be **true worshipers and true Christians**.

Now look at an important piece of information in John 6:53-66. Jesus has taught His disciples a poignant lesson about His cruci-

fixion and what their religious practice would be thereafter in regard to His body and blood. Notice the reaction by some: "This is a ***hard teaching***. Who can accept it?" (v. 60). Jesus asked them: "Does this ***offend*** you?" (v.61). Then comes verse 66: "***From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him***" (emphases added). These people could not handle the truth.

Ask yourself if there is anything that you might find in God's word that would cause you to have a similar problem. At which point might you discover some truth that is too hard for ***you*** to bear? This is a possibility that you will face if you want to know God's truth and have it direct your belief and practice.

Barriers to Practicing the Truth

Jesus often confronted the barriers to worshiping God in spirit and truth. In Matthew 15, the Pharisees questioned Him about why His disciples were breaking the traditions of the Fathers by not washing their hands before eating. Jesus' reply was: "Why do you **break the command of God** for the sake of your tradition?" (v. 3; emphases added). He followed up by saying: "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'" (vv. 8, 9). You could add to that "...as though they were the commandment of God."

How many traditions of men do you obey as though they were the commandment of God? How many of them cause you to break the commandment of God? Many of you are probably sifting things through your mind and coming up with something like Hallowe'en. You smile and say: "Yes, that is one tradition that is pagan to the core. God does not want us to worship the devil or the dead by observing it." What about other pagan observances like Valentine's Day? How about Mardi Gras? Christmas? Eas-

ter? They all came from the same Babylonian source. Which of these could you give up for the sake of the ***truth***? How many family or religious traditions that are *not* rooted in God's truth are you willing to forsake so that you can worship God in spirit and in truth?

Another problem that you are faced with is the prevalence of so many denominations that call themselves "Christian." Your first response is probably to ask: "Why would 'Christian' denominations be a barrier to practicing the truth?" This is going to be one of those "hard sayings." Note carefully how God's word reveals the answer to us.

Jesus sets up the situation for us in Matthew 24:4-11, 23-27. Note this important fact: ***There are many imposters in our world today who present themselves as the representatives of Jesus Christ. Jesus warns His people to not be deceived by them.*** Note Jesus' emphasis on the word ***many***. This signals the seeing eye that there will be a considerable number of them – not just an insignificant, occasional few. There are *many* false Christs and false preachers loose in our world today who are presenting themselves as the servants of Christ. They are imposters. Pretenders. Charlatans.

Look at Matthew 7:21-23. The Lord Himself says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then will I tell them plainly, '***I never knew you. Get away from me, you evildoers!***'" (emphases added). Are you of the opinion that anyone who does something in the name of Jesus Christ *automatically* has His blessing? Does this remark by Jesus sound too harsh for you? Would you walk away from the truth because of it? Can you handle the truth?

Now look at 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 13-15. The Apostle Paul weighs in on this matter. Notice how he chastises the Corinthians

about being receptive to those who come with *a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel*. These men came to the Corinthians in the name of Jesus Christ and preached a gospel about Him and promised a spirit to help them. Paul said that they were agents of Satan who were masquerading as the apostles of Christ and using a deceptive “righteousness” to lead them into error. How would you know the difference?

He also had problems in Galatia. Notice Galatians 1:6-10: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to *a different gospel*, which is really not a gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to *pervert* the gospel of Christ” (emphases added). Paul then pronounced a very serious curse upon such people.

Would it be difficult for you to believe that there are over **32,000** so-called “Christian” denominations at large in the world today that preach a different “Jesus” from one another and opposing “gospels” by different “spirits”? Does it bother you that you must align yourself with a church that worships God in spirit and in truth – that you can’t satisfy God by simply joining just any old church that comes along proclaiming that they “preach Christ and Him crucified”? Would that offend you? Can you handle this truth?

Here’s the point again: *Finding and living by God’s truth is the primary goal of those who want to be True Worshipers and True Christians*. God is not satisfied with anything less. We have that on the word of Jesus Christ Himself. It will only be through the agency of the Holy Spirit – that Spirit of truth – that you will come to know and correctly practice God’s truth.

Other Questions You Must Answer

In your quest for God’s truth, there are several other questions that you must consider. These, too, bring with them that possibil-

ity of freedom or quandary. The answers to these questions are contained in God's word. Remember: *God's word is truth*. Paul tells Timothy: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). He also taught him to "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who rightly handles the word of truth" (1 Timothy 2:15). He called God's True Church "...the church of the Living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

God's question to you is this: ***Where, in all of those 32,000+ so-called "Christian" churches, is God's True Church?*** Would you be able to recognize it by the truth it teaches? If not, why not? Would you rush to embrace it? Or, would you be reluctant to do so if embracing God's truth required you to forsake family and/or religious traditions that make you feel good and with which you are very comfortable (Matthew 10:34-39)?

What if it required you to observe the seventh-day Sabbath commanded in God's law? (See Exodus 20:8-11.) What if it showed you that God has other days of salvation in store for mankind? Could you tolerate a gospel that does not include *heaven* as the eternal reward of the saved? At which point would you decide that it is too hard for you to be obedient? At which point would you walk away?

Revelation 17 speaks of the Babylonian harlot who is the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth – who has intoxicated the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her adultery. You must seriously understand that she is alive and doing well in our present, evil world. She and her daughters have spread before you many "Christian" alternatives to the truth. The most important question of your life centers on whether or not you can handle *God's truth* as opposed to the Babylonian perversion of it. Be aware of this simple, biblical fact: part of coming to know

God's truth demands that we engage in conversations about who is teaching what and why some are right and some are wrong. It is not self-righteous to enter into those arguments; it is simply learning how to live by every word of God's truth. Those who wander through life with the attitude of "live and let live" will not be following the example of Jesus Christ – the example by which He brought the sword of God's word to set things straight (Matthew 10:34-39). This book is designed to help you answer the hard questions and make the correct decisions – *if you can handle it.*

In Christ's Service,

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-Introduction-

Spiritual Growth and Development

(2 Peter 3:14-18)

One of the great disappointments of being an educator is finding that the students with whom you begin the school year are not prepared for the grade-level material you have to teach. This can be due to many factors – including indifference by lower grade teachers, lack of continuity in the curriculum, and/or superficial learning by the students.

Whatever the reason, you have a choice to make: (1) be superficial in your own teaching and make sure most of your students “pass,” whether or not they are prepared for the next level, or (2) trace their performance level back to a point of competence and begin there to try to bring them up to grade level as quickly as possible so that you can get them back on track for the next grade level.

Needless to say, it is a great disappointment not to be able to simply move on *because you cannot have any confidence in their ability to grasp more mature instruction.* The door to “higher” education is closed to them in many ways because it is so dependent on the fundamental principles that are the building blocks for what they are yet to learn. What happens if the problem is uncorrected?

Sometimes, however, you discover that the curriculum continuity is not the fault, the previous teachers did, indeed, cover the subject matter adequately, and the students showed themselves to be competent – at least for the purposes of being promoted. To your dismay, however, you find that you have *willful ignorance* and *resistance* to moving on to greater understanding and ability levels. This is another problem altogether – at least as great as teaching someone who simply reaches a level which they are altogether incapable of surmounting. And...the attitude is infectious – affecting the attitudes and motivations of many of the other students. The learning process slows to a creeping crawl – if it doesn't stop altogether.

It is at least as disappointing – and, understandably, probably more so – for Christian leaders to find that these problems are as common in the areas of spiritual growth and development as they are in the secular educational arena. What do you do to overcome it? What is the Christian's responsibility for spiritual growth and development? It is here that we learn about the meaning of “meat in due season.” It is here that we commit ourselves to becoming more mature, knowledgeable Christians.

* * * *

The Apostle Paul scolded the Corinthians because of their spiritual infantilism. He told them that he could not speak to them like *spiritual* people; he had to speak to them like *carnal* people – even like they were mere babes in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1). To put this in its proper perspective, we have to remember Paul's instruction to the Romans. He described the *carnal mind* as being hostile toward God and totally incapable and unwilling to be subject to His laws and ways – with no possibility of pleasing God in the least (Romans 8:5-8). And, because of this carnality, he said that the Corinthians were incapable of making any progress in things spiritual. Imagine Paul's great frustration!

Paul told them that he had to feed them with *milk*, instead of *meat* because, up to this point, they were not able to take meat, and they were *still* not able to do so (v. 2). What did Paul mean by those terms – *milk* and *meat*? The context gives us a clue when he calls the Corinthians *spiritual babes*. Think about the imagery Paul is using here. Think about a baby that is only *hours* old – a *mere infant* (NIV). A *mere infant* is incapable of feeding itself. It hardly even knows that it is alive. Someone else must prepare the food it consumes and make sure that it is properly fed – placing the food directly into the infant’s mouth. If the food-giver fails in his/her responsibility of providing the proper food in the proper amounts, the infant could very soon die of starvation or other health complications! At the very least, it could have stunted growth and serious, chronic health problems. And, of course, they have to provide the infant with *proper* food. It is not enough just to fill its empty stomach because simply doing that does not necessarily provide the proper nutrients the mere infant needs. You can die from malnutrition with a full stomach!

It is apparent that these Corinthians were either very new to the Christian faith, or they were only able to operate on a spiritual level that was equivalent to someone who was very new to the faith. Either way, their spiritual condition was not something about which Paul was very happy. The context gives us the clue that they had been around long enough to have graduated from spiritual infantilism to a higher level of spiritual understanding and conduct. They had been around long enough to have been “weaned” from spiritual *milk* (that is, learning the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith – like learning one’s A, B, Cs and how to count) and put on spiritual *meat* (the deeper, more spiritual aspects of true faith and practice). Something was very wrong – and there seemed to be no good reason for it.

Their actions demonstrated that Paul’s efforts to give them the spiritual education they needed were not yielding the fruit for which he had hoped. They were simply not making any progress

in the faith. They were not *growing* in the grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It appears to have been a matter of *willful ignorance* and *resistance* because Paul did not say that they were intellectually *incapable* of doing so – that is, they were not so poorly educated that they could not understand what he was teaching them. So...Paul could not assume that they were going to understand anything and everything he had to teach them.

The Apostle Peter said that Paul and other Apostles taught the same spiritual concepts, but Paul included ideas that were difficult to understand. Nevertheless, the problem with ignorant and unstable people is that they pervert and distort things they are taught. They might get some of the ideas correct, but the overall piece of understanding is going to be incorrect because of the perversions and distortions. This is not a problem only to the ignorant and unstable...because they pass those errors on to others (2 Peter 3:14-18). From there, the distortions and perversions enlarge.

The Corinthians were not alone in this condition. The Hebrews, an unidentified group of people for whom the letter was intended, were in a similar condition. And...Paul scolded them, too, by saying that it was difficult for him to explain many things about Christ and His doctrines to them because they had become sluggish, indifferent, and inattentive – what the King James Version refers to as being *dull of hearing*. When they should have already become teachers of others, they needed someone to go back over all of God's basic doctrines and the principles for interpreting them; they had gone back to needing *milk* instead of *meat*. Can you imagine having to do that with your child with *physical food*?

Consider what Paul had taught them up to this point in the letter: (a) the superiority of Jesus over the angels (ch. 1), (b) Christians being brought into the God family to rule over the world to come with Jesus Christ (ch. 2), (c) Jesus being superior to Moses, the great Law-giver (ch. 3), (d) the “Sabbath” God has reserved for His people – that is, the 1,000-year kingdom of God that is to be set up by Christ and co-ruled by True Christians (ch. 4a), and (e)

Jesus Christ the great high priest (ch. 4b, 5). But, in 5:11-14 Paul came to a screeching halt because he sensed the Hebrews' inability to understand what he was talking about!

Paul told them that *it is a fact that anyone who is still living on spiritual milk after so long a time cannot digest the doctrine of righteousness* [that is, “meat”] *because he is still a spiritual babe – so very spiritually immature.* Meat is for spiritually mature individuals who have trained their minds – by practice – to distinguish between good and evil (Hebrews 5:11-14). These people had, for all practical purposes, gone *backwards!* Then he presented them with a dire warning in Hebrews 6:1-12.

This section of scripture is written with 5:11-14 in mind. Remember that chapters and verses are the inventions of men. These writings were originally letters – and, they were not broken down into chapters and verses. Without writing the quote word-for-word, I’ll paraphrase its contents: Don’t put yourself into the position of having to be taught only the fundamental truths of the Christian faith over and over and over again. If you have understood the teachings of the true faith, known by experience what it means to have been forgiven of your sins, received the Holy Spirit after baptism and laying on of hands (with very few exceptions, no one else gets the Holy Spirit except in this manner), known the truth of God’s word by experience, and experienced a *taste* of the age to come through God’s blessings in your life, then it is a terrible thing to go backward to a point that is like you never experienced any of it. It is to put yourself into *apostasy – a renunciation or abandonment of the true faith.* The net result is, of course, no possibility of ever returning to the true faith. *That* is a terrible position into which one could put himself! Paul says that the problem faced by the Hebrews was that they did not *practice* the things they learned – and...because of that, the knowledge and faith did not embed itself into their hearts and minds. They were running the risk of falling away from the true faith and losing future salva-

tion. *This was serious business!* Hebrews 6:4-8 specifically warns professing Christians about this!

The spiritually mature person is one who has progressed in the faith to the point that he has spiritual wisdom and understanding – sound judgment and discernment – to the point of being able to distinguish between good and evil. The spiritually mature are constantly using the things they have learned – which reinforces the learning process and enables that learning to become “second nature.” For example, Paul instructed the Galatians to consider the role of the Law of God in spiritual growth and development (Galatians 3:23-25). He described it as being a *paidagogos* – the imagery is one of an old and trusted servant of the family whose job it was to *assist* in the moral development of the child...generally, the male child, but don’t take the imagery too far. The *paidagogos*’s most important job was that of supervising the child’s behavior and taking the child back and forth to school to make sure he was safe and not tempted to stray from getting to school. So, supervising the child’s moral conduct and education were very important tasks.

The Law of God, said Paul, is similar in that it leads us to Christ. It instructs us about the mind of God – teaching us what constitutes sin (see Romans 7:7). It puts us into a position to know Christ and what He did for our failures to measure up to the true spiritual nature and meaning of God’s various laws. It supervises our moral development and spiritual education. We learn that we might have refrained from murdering, but being angry with our brother without cause is just as bad; we might not have physically committed adultery, but, if we are married and have had sexual fantasies about someone other than our spouse, we have, in fact, committed adultery (Matthew 5:21-32). Being faced with the penalty for law-breaking imposes upon us the necessity to have it dealt with by God’s grace. The Law is holy and spiritual; the commandment is holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12, 14). Thus, it shuts the mouth of the sinner and makes him subject to the judgment of God – and all have sinned (Romans 3:19-23; 1 John 3:4).

Unless remedied through Jesus Christ, that sin will receive the judgment of a death from which there is no recovery (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15).

Once we have been led to Christ, the *paidagogos*'s work is done – basically because we should have internalized the Law of God in its many aspects so that we now act upon it like it is “second nature.” In other words, we don’t need the letter-by-letter, rote memorization process any longer. We should be able to perform the demands of the Law independently now because it is embedded in the fabric of our hearts and minds – “spirit,” if you will. In James 1:22-25, James said that *acting upon the word of God* is of vital necessity – and he, no doubt, had the Law of God in mind (see v. 25). If we don’t *use* the information we have been given, then we *forget* it! *That is a dangerous way to treat our spiritual growth and development* – especially if you have gone backwards like the Corinthians and Hebrews! It is very difficult to imagine all of the reasons why anyone would fall into such a trap – but, obviously, it happens.

The Prophet Isaiah was inspired to write a stingingly critical prophecy concerning the *spiritual leaders* in Judaism during his time. As he did so, he mockingly quoted one of their drunken tirades against him: ““To whom shall he [that is, Isaiah] teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Those who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon; here a little, and there a little”” (Isaiah 28:9, 10, KJV). You could very well imagine him doing it in an imitation of a child derisively singing “yah, yah-yah, yah, yah!”

Apparently those who were supposed to be able to teach these things had become incapacitated due to their self-indulgence and drunkenness; therefore, *their* teaching was wrong and/or inconsequential. It is implied here that they had been mocking Isaiah for the oracles of doom and captivity he had brought from God Himself – which were brought about because of their wrongheaded

beliefs and practices in the name of God. They contemptuously scolded him because they thought he was acting as though he was a schoolmaster trying to teach small children the alphabet and numbers. They were the religious *leaders*! How dare he condescend to teach them in such a fashion? So, their drunken tirade was, apparently, a direct quote from Isaiah himself.

Isaiah's retort was that they would hear their sarcasm again in the speech of strangers and at the hands of their captors (vv. 11-13). He did not, however, dispute the idea that, leading up to being weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts, one must learn the doctrine of God line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. This is certainly in line with Paul's observation in Galatians 3:23-25 – that we were allowed no freedom by the Law and were looked after until *faith* was revealed. The Law was to be our schoolmaster until we came to have faith in Christ, and we could be justified by that faith. Once that time has come, we no longer need the schoolmaster to watch over us like small children. Once the "weaning" has taken place, and the spirit of the Law has been placed in our hearts and minds (see Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Hebrews 10:1-17), obedience is no longer dependent on a rote, mechanical learning process. The "schoolmaster" itself is not abolished because there will be succeeding generations of "children" who will need to be trained and weaned. Admittedly, "school" is always in for someone. The "children" who are thus weaned will be able to take "meat in due season" – to get increasingly more substantial spiritual food – in order to grow up in Christ to spiritual maturity.

Here is the lesson Paul taught the Ephesians: While it is true that each one of us is given his own particular endowment of grace, limited only by the gift of Christ (see Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27), it is also true that Christ has provided His people with peculiar spiritual gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Why? For the purpose of bringing the Church to spiritual maturity, for the work of the ministry, for the education

of the body of Christ. Why? So that we all can come into the *unity* of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God (see Jude 3) – until we become fully mature with the fullness of Christ Himself. Why? So that we will no longer be *children* who are tossed in every direction and carried along by every wind of doctrine, at the mercy of all the tricks of men as they cleverly practice their deceit. If we live by the truth and in love, we shall *grow* in all ways into Christ (4:7, 11-16). Paul admits here that *spiritual children* are more subject to deception, distortion, and perversion of thought than are the spiritually mature!

Hebrews 6:1-3, then, is Paul's admonition for the Hebrews to get beyond the elementary teachings and move on to the "meat." Notice the knowledge that Paul considers to be "elementary": (a) repentance from dead works, (b) faith toward God, (c) baptisms, (d) laying on of hands (for blessing, healing, ordination, and receipt of the Holy Spirit), (e) resurrection of the dead, and (f) eternal judgment. If the spiritual "infant" does not move on to the "meat," then it is safe to say that there is no growth taking place, and the chance of producing meaningful "fruit" simply does not exist. You do not get to "meat" by continually pursuing the "milk." Nor do you get there by having to be constantly reminded of the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ. You increase the possibility of being led off on a wrong path that could lead to your ultimate destruction. Both the teacher and the student must be willing and able to move on – to learn and grow.

In His parable about the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9, Jesus' point is that He is seeking "fruit" from His disciples. Those who do not bear it are considered to be worthless and worthy of destruction. After three years of looking for fruit on this fig tree, there was none to be found. The fruitless tree was to be cut down! Why allow it to take up valuable space? Are we judged by a three-year measuring rod? I don't think so, but it appears that Christ expects us to be capable of producing spiritual fruit after a reasonable amount of time. It is very difficult to read this parable and not take

notice of the dire warning it contains about growth and fruitfulness – about not wasting the place you have been given in God’s True Church..

The same is true of His parable in Matthew 21:33-44 about the wicked husbandmen who were put in charge of their Lord’s vineyard. When the Lord of the vineyard sent for the required fruits, the wicked husbandmen beat His messengers and slew them – including His Son. Jesus asked them what the Lord of the vineyard would do to these wicked husbandmen, and they answered that He would destroy those wicked men completely and lease His vineyard to men who will deliver the fruit to Him when the season arrives (v. 41). Who, then, could not understand the meaning of verse 43? If you are likewise resistant to the charge God has given you to be fruitful, then the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to those who will bring forth the fruits of the Kingdom. There is a great responsibility laid upon the Christian to grow and develop into spiritual maturity – bringing forth the fruit of that maturity. Use your space wisely – or lose it!

In 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, Paul gives us this admonition: All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness to prepare the man of God for spiritual maturity and thoroughly equip him to do all manner of good works. Here, the word *perfect* is the Greek word *artios*. It means *complete, capable, proficient – able to meet all demands*. This scripture makes two most important points: (1) the road to salvation does not end with the conversion of the individual. William Barclay, a great theologian and commentator in his own right, said: “Any change, any conversion which makes a man think of nothing but the fact that *he* has been saved is no true change and no true conversion” (*Daily Study Bible*, “The Letters to Timothy,” p. 232). (2) The point of studying the scriptures is to make oneself useful to God and his fellow man. Becoming adept in the use of the true spiritual intent of the scriptures comes from studying them line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little

and there a little. Getting to the “meat” prepares you to serve your fellow man more effectively in God’s work of salvation – being capable of meeting all demands made upon it. Hebrews 5:12-14 makes this point very strongly.

In Matthew 5:48, where Christ admonishes us to be as *perfect* as our Father in heaven is *perfect*, He uses the Greek word *teleios*. This word has a little different meaning than *artios*. While *teleios* means *to be fully developed in a moral sense*, that is not the complete idea given by the word. This word is never used to describe a *beginner*. Nor is it used to describe someone who is still a spiritual “babe” after several years. A person is *teleios* if s/he *has* accomplished the purpose for which s/he was created and sent into the world. Jesus outlined that for us in John15:16 when He said that we have not chosen Him, but He has chosen us that we should go and bring forth fruit – fruit that will last. And He was not talking about doing only enough of a superficial job to, hopefully, “pass.”

It also means that one is *suitable for that same purpose*. For example, since the slot-head screwdriver is not *teleios* for a Phillips-head screw, it cannot accomplish the purpose for which it was planned, designed, and created when one tries to set a Phillips-head screw with it. You might be able to fool around with the Phillips-head screw and eventually get it in or out with a slot-head screwdriver, but the slot-head still is not *teleios* for that purpose any more than it is *teleios* for chiseling! Christians are no different: they must be *suitable* for the purpose for which they were planned, designed, and created, and they must *accomplish* that purpose. So, it is vitally important to understand this concept of being *teleios*.

More important than any other purpose, God’s word tells us the greater purpose for which we were created: “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26, 27). That, my friend, is not based solely upon the moment when you accepted Christ as your Savior. *Teleios* and *artios* suggest that you are in for a mandatory education in God’s thoughts and ways (see Isaiah 55:6-11 – and study all the places in the Bible where bringing forth

“fruit” is discussed). *Failure to accept that education is dangerous.*

So, what is the great purpose for which God planned, designed, and brought mankind into existence? And...expected the production of spiritual “fruit”? There are several references in scripture to substantiate this “mystery.” The answer is exciting to contemplate. It points to an incredible potential for all of humanity – regardless of your lot in life. But, there is a price to be paid for obtaining it.

Genesis 1:26 tells us that, after He had made everything else *after its kind*, God made man in *His* image – after *His* likeness. According to Ephesians 1:4, this was planned before the orderly universe was created: “...He chose us in Christ *before the foundation of the world...*” (emphasis added). The term *world* is translated from the Greek term *kosmos*. Although it has several meanings, in this case it means “... *the world* as the sum total of everything here and now, the (*orderly*) universe...” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, The University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 446). If nothing else, it at least shows that God planned this before the *earth itself* was created. “God” in Genesis 1 is *Elohim*, which is a collective noun – that means that it names a *plural* entity, like *family*, *herd*, and *class*: “...let us make man in our image and after our likeness.”

Consider the following scripture. In John 1:1-3, we are told that there were two of these Beings “in the beginning,” each of them a God-being. The Being known as the Word was, apparently, the Spokesman – the Greek is *Logos*. The *Word* was *with God* – that is, He accompanied another God-being who was His companion. And...*the Word was God* – that is, the Word Himself was a God-being. Everything that has ever been made was made by and through the Word. John further distinguishes the Word from the one called “God” in verse 14 by saying that the Word was caused to become flesh and came to dwell among humans. Humans, John

being one of them, saw His glory, the glory that is His as the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth. The Greek term for *made* is *ginomai*, which means, in this case, "...persons or things which change their nature, to indicate their entering a new condition..." (*Ibid.*, p. 158). This, it appears, is the meaning of "*was caused to become*." In verse 18, John again shows us that there are two of these Beings by saying that one has been seen, while the other has not. Jesus, who has been seen, came to reveal the existence of the Father, who has not been seen (see also John 5:37; 6:46 and Matthew 11:25-27).

Paul tells us in Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus Christ is the "...brightness of [the Father's] glory, and the express image of His person..." Others translate this to say that Jesus is a "perfect copy" of God the Father. Paul shows us in Philippians 2:5, 6 that Jesus, when He was in His "God" form in the beginning, did not consider His equality with the "God" who later became known as the Father a thing He had as a result of robbery or unlawful seizure. His equality with "God" did not diminish "God" in the least (see John 5:17-23). His "glory" was His by the same circumstance that the Father had His. They were equals in every sense of the word. But...verses 7 and 8 reveal that the Word *agreed* – probably even *volunteered* – to subordinate Himself to the One who became the Father. You can see the nature of this subordination in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 – the Word became subject to His Associate by choice, not by losing anything in a power struggle with Him. Although He was given all power in heaven and on earth (see Matthew 28:18 and Philippians 2:9), He will ultimately turn everything over to the Father and subject Himself to Him when He has accomplished His purpose. In order to accomplish His goal of atonement for mankind, He *was caused to become flesh*. There was some process developed by which "God" (the Word) could be made to become, for all practical purposes, a *spermatazoon* for the purpose of impregnating a young virgin named Mary (see Isaiah 7:14; 9:6, 7 and Matthew 1:18-25).

In Philippians 2: 6, 7, Paul uses the word *form* when he speaks of Jesus Christ as *God* and *servant*. This Greek word, *morphe*, means *the essential form that never alters*. In other words, even when He was made flesh, He was still *God* (see Matthew 1:23, where it says "...they shall call His name *Emmanuel*, which means 'God with us'"). In Colossians 1:15, 16, Paul shows us that Jesus is "...the image of the invisible God [that is, the Father, who still has not been seen], the *firstborn* of every creature: for by Him [that is, by Jesus Christ] were all things in heaven and earth created, visible and invisible...all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He existed before anything was created...." While He was in the flesh, He took upon Himself the *schema* of the flesh (Philippians 2:7, 8: "...made in the *likeness* of men; and being found in *fashion* as a man...", emphasis added) – that is, *those characteristics and essential forms that can and do change*. In other words, He grew and developed in the same way all humans grow and develop (see Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16).

The term *firstborn* in Colossians 1:15 does not mean that Jesus Christ was a created being, as some claim. This term describes His position as the *first* of the *firstfruits* from the dead by resurrection. Note Acts 26:22, 23, where Paul states emphatically that He was the *first* to be raised from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, He is called "...*the firstfruits of them that slept*," and "...*Christ the firstfruits*..." He was the type or figure of what is to happen to humans when Christ recovers them from the grave by a resurrection. Jesus Christ was *God* before becoming human. When He was resurrected from the grave, He again assumed His previous God-form (see John 17:5). He changed His *schema* but not His *morphe*. It is important to understand the terms *morphe* and *schema*.

Jesus was also the wave-sheaf offering described in Leviticus 23:10-14 – called "...*a sheaf of the firstfruits*..." It was offered on a particular Sunday related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Compare that to John 20:17, where Jesus told Mary Magdalene on

Sunday morning, after His resurrection, not to touch Him *because He had not yet ascended to the Father*, and Matthew 28:9, where, later in the day, His disciples held Him by His feet. During the time between these two events, Jesus Christ ascended to appear before the Father as the Wave-sheaf offering – the *first* of the *first-fruits*. He was the model of what we will become and how we will achieve it. What is the significance of the *ordinal number* (“first”), and what does that mean in the greater scheme of things?

James tells us: “Of His own will He begat *us* with the word of truth, that *we* should be a kind of *firstfruits* of His creatures” (emphasis added). We will be like Him when we are resurrected (see 1 John 3:1, 2). Also, notice Leviticus 23:17 where the two *leavened* loaves offered on Pentecost are called “*...the firstfruits unto the Lord.*” These are symbolic of the True Christians who are called out between the time of Adam and Eve and the return of Jesus Christ and raised in the *first* resurrection (see Revelation 20:4-6). This group will be the *first* – of at least two resurrections – who will be changed from flesh to spirit as they are added to the God-kind.

First is an *ordinal number*. If there is a *first*, there *must be* at least a *second* – and there can be *third, fourth*, and so on. Zechariah reveals that there will be surviving humans from various nations after their battle with Christ at His return (Zechariah 14:16-19). Isaiah 2:1-5 reveals that these humans will be instructed in God’s righteousness during the 1,000-year reign of Christ. This opens the door for *secondfruits*. Revelation 20:5a reveals a coming *second* resurrection, which will be a resurrection to human form instead of a glorious spirit body. You can see an example of this in Ezekiel 37, where God resurrects the two Houses of Israel – Israel and Judah – and makes them one nation again. They are resurrected in human form so they can be instructed in God’s truth for the first time. This resurrection will include all of the masses who have lived and died without knowing God’s truth – even

though they might have been religious people. This opens the door for *thirdfruits*. Do you get the picture?

Just as surely as Isaiah prophesied “Of the *increase* of His government [that is, Jesus Christ’s] there shall be no end...”, the door for *additional fruits* in the eternity ahead has been flung wide open! The meaning of this Hebrew word, *marbiyth* (increase), includes growth in the size of a family, its wealth and foodstuffs, and its fame and power. Imagine the possibility of Elohim continually adding to the Elohim family in the eternity ahead (see also Isaiah 65:17-25 and Amos 9:11-15)! Imagine the love of God working to recover from the dust of the ground those countless *billions* of human beings who were unable to understand God’s truth by virtue of being born into paganism – or by virtue of being deceived by the god of this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9; and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Paul revealed to us that God has planned to put in charge of the world to come the humans who become His sons through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:5-18). In this most enlightening stretch of scripture, Paul reveals some most interesting things about Elohim’s plan and purpose for creating mankind in Their image. First, this plan must be understood and taken seriously by mankind – missing out on it constitutes a great loss for the individual (vv. 1-4). Second, mankind was created a little lower than the angels and given authority over the creation around him for a special purpose: training in righteousness. Why? Because those who grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ will rule with Him in the world to come (vv. 5-10). Third, when it is all said and done, mankind will join the God family and be superior to the angels (vv. 11-18; see also chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians 6:3).

Is it any wonder, then, that Paul would admonish us through his words to Timothy to “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not have to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)? Dare we neglect such a high calling? Dare we attempt to enter such a family with only a paltry

level of spiritual understanding? God forbid! God forbid that we should expect such a great thing as He has planned for us if we merely bury in some mental hole – covered with a dirty napkin – what He reveals to us (see Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27)! No, not only is growth expected, but with that growth there must be fruits produced that demonstrate that you are serving the purpose for which you exist! Luke 13:6-8 tells us that a fruit tree is *useless* if it does not produce the fruit it is expected to produce. Providing shade is not enough.

Keeping in mind all that has been explained thus far, I have chosen to write this book for those who aspire to be spiritually mature. It is not by accident that I chose the title from Psalm 104:27. There are two aspects of the title that are expressly important for you to understand: (a) *meat*, as opposed to *milk*, and (b) *due season*. Both of these expressions are important for your quest to spiritual maturity. You cannot be quixotic; you cannot be sleepy and slothful; you must be alert and hungry and thirsty – regarding this knowledge as more important than all else in your life (see Matthew 5:6; 6:24, 33). I have already explained *meat* as opposed to *milk*. What meaning is intended with the expression *due season*? This, too, is very important to understand.

The psalmist is referring to a proper and suitable time for this “meat” to be provided. One of the problems Paul experienced with the Corinthians was that a *due season* had not occurred during which he could introduce the “meat” (see 1 Corinthians 3:2 – “...up to this point you could not tolerate it...”). It serves no useful purpose to give solid foods to an infant if his system cannot digest them. In the same way, it serves no useful purpose to give spiritually immature people the “hard sayings” if they cannot digest them – or, if they willfully ignore them.

The central message of Ecclesiastes 3:18 is that everything has its *due season* – a time when it is appropriate for certain things to happen: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” When does this *due season* for “meat”

arrive? When line has been laid upon line and precept upon precept. When the elementary things have been learned to provide the solid foundation upon which the spiritual edifice can be built. When one has been weaned from the “milk” and taken away from the “breasts.” There is no shortcut. No jumping ahead. Some will get to this point sooner than others.

Paul admonished Timothy to explain to his congregants that they should lay up a good foundation because of the things they would experience in the future so “...that they may lay hold of eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:19). This foundation of God is steady and dependable (2 Timothy 2:19). He warned the Corinthians to beware of how they built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ because there is no other acceptable foundation. On this foundation you can build in gold, silver, and jewels, or in wood, grass, and straw – but, be sure to choose your building materials wisely because your work is going to be revealed when the time comes: in *due season*. That day will bring a fire that will test the quality of each person’s work. If his structure stands up to it, he will be rewarded accordingly. If it is burned down, then he will be the loser. Even if he himself is ultimately saved, it will be as one who has gone through fire. Learning the “meat” will help you to choose quality, instead of inadequate, building materials. Of course, Jesus also warns us in Luke 6:46-49 that the foundation can make the difference between a building that stands during the storms of time and one that is destroyed.

In John 6:48-69, Jesus explained to His disciples – the Twelve and others – the spiritual meaning of His being the Bread of Life. Some of them reacted very strangely when He said: “...Of a truth I say to you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (see vv. 51-57). Many of those followers said: “This is a *hard saying*; who can hear it?” *The Jerusalem Bible* puts it this way: “This is *intolerable* language. How could anyone accept it?” (v. 60; emphasis added). It was probably from this very spiritual lesson that the idea was spawned that

Christians engaged in cannibalism! Even though Jesus said "...The words I speak to you are spirit, and they are life," the net result was that "From that time many of His disciples left Him and stopped following Him" (v. 66). In other words, *they renounced and abandoned their loyalty to Him and became apostates*. Could it be that *due season* had not been reached yet? That they simply were not yet prepared to understand such deeply spiritual instruction? Had they been "...weaned from the milk, drawn from the breasts..." and prepared to receive meat in due season? Apparently, Christ thought they *were* ready.

What about you? Are you ready? Or, are you still floundering around with the elementary precepts of God's word? Can you get beyond the elementary levels of spiritual knowledge and begin understanding God's ways and thoughts on a much more mature level? If not – why not?

I want to challenge you to think about the "meat" that your Bible reveals as *truth*. Plain *truth*. *God's truth*. Please take the time to look up every scripture, to meditate on the messages, and to pray about what you should do with regard to these messages. I think the following studies are the types to which you can return again and again and continue to gain more and more insight from them. It is a journey well worth the investment of your time and careful thought. May God bless your understanding – your spiritual eyes and ears – as you study through the "meat."

-One-

Studying the Bible (1)

In the King James Version of the Bible, Proverbs 15:28 instructs us that: “The heart of the righteous *studies to answer.*” The Revised Standard Version reads: “The mind of the righteous *ponders how to answer.*” The New International Version reads: “The heart of the righteous *weighs its answers.*” For what kinds of things are the righteous to have answers? Why is it so imperative that the righteous *study to answer, or ponder how to answer, or weigh their answers?* Behind this short verse from the “wisdom” books of God’s holy word is a veritable treasure of spiritual imperative – an admonition that, if faithfully followed, will lead the searcher for God’s truth to spiritual understanding and freedom experienced only by the few.

No doubt there are going to be situations that arise in our relationships with others in and out of the true faith that will re-quire us to respond to difficult questions, idle curiosity, unfounded accusations, perplexities, and sincere inquiries. The Apostle Peter wrote: “...Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and always be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you for the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). So, part of the answer lies in the preparation of one’s heart *to learn* wisdom, while the rest of the answer lies in understanding *how to use it appropriately* in any given situation once we have it.

In order to gain this understanding, one needs to know *how to study the Bible*. It should be self-evident why we should study (for example, see 2 Timothy 2:15), but it is not always understood how to actually go about it in a way that will lead to properly understanding God's *truth* (John 17:17). God's word is truth – and God requires those who worship Him to worship Him in *spirit* and in *truth* (John 4:23-24). Knowing how to study the Bible helps to facilitate that.

The point of Proverbs 15:28 is the same as the point of the entire book of Proverbs: *every spiritual faculty of a righteous person should be earnestly employed in the search for wisdom – the ears inclined to hearing it and the heart inclined to understanding it*. In most cases, however, wisdom is like a hidden treasure and cannot be readily discerned or found (Matthew 13:44). Proverbs 2:1-5 gives the impression that it is not easily acquired. It must be considered highly valuable – even to the point that you would raise your voice and cry out for it during your search.

It is *not* common sense – nor does it just fall out of the sky to hit you on the head with a bolt from some kind of divine magic wand. It is some-thing gained by *desiring* it, *searching* for it, and *meditating* upon it. In our helter-skelter world, it is not always convenient to find the time – much less set aside the time – to search and meditate on the spiritual matters of life.

The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians to be wise in their dealings with those who are not of the faith, taking every opportunity they had to discuss the ways of Christ with them. A most important point was that they should always be gracious – and by all means they should not act like religious zealots (Colossians 4:5, 6). Rest assured, you will have plenty of opportunities to answer if you spend your time earnestly seeking God's wisdom and truth (James 1:5-8). As you grow in God's wisdom and truth, you will be more apt to attract attention from others who are also seekers – as well as from those who are enemies of truth. It would only make sense that you should be spiritually prepared to deal with

either eventuality. You cannot fake your way through it. You cannot allow yourself to be thrown off-message because of temper. This search for God's wisdom and truth necessitates that you be ready to answer and know how to answer each one who presents himself to you. Be superficial or lose your temper, and you most certainly will lose your opportunity to present an effective witness.

Finally, the Apostle John admonished us to be aware of the multitude of deceivers in the world who attempt to make religious merchandise of people. We should be familiar enough with God's word to be able to put them to the test to see if they really represent the interests of God (1 John 4:1). Jesus Christ said the same thing in Matthew 24:11 when He spoke of the *many false prophets* that shall arise during the course of history and deceive many – especially just prior to and during the great tribulation (vv. 23-26). Those who worship God in spirit and in truth *must* be able to learn, understand, and faithfully spread to others the "...faith once delivered unto the saints..." (Jude 3). We must understand that we will be outnumbered – *many* deceivers are presently out there. We must have answers for the pretensions of the ungodly. We must go into this spiritual fray understanding that there are many *pretenders* among us.

How do we do that? How do we get the Bible to give up its great wisdom and understanding to us? To help us gain God's knowledge and learn to think as He thinks and act as He acts? It is possible – *and you can do it!*

Rule #1: Know the Real Issue

Walter Hooper, in his preface to C. S. Lewis' work *God in the Dock*, said: "Regardless of one's education, it is impossible to decide whether Christianity is true or false *if you do not know what it is about...*there are *many* today who do not know what the *real issue* is" (p. 9; emphasis added). Wow! Such a statement is relevant to our discussion because, again, it points out the fact that

many are at the root of the problem. Hooper could have said just as easily that *few* know what the real issue is. Talking around the issue does not set you on the path to truth. So, rule #1 in gaining Godly wisdom so that you can be prepared to answer is simple: *Know the real issue about Christianity as it relates to God's truth and the problems of this world.* But. . .how do you discover the *real issue*?

Many times you can answer a multitude of questions if you know the truth of a single issue. For example, there is a comment made by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:46 that appears to be insignificant in his discussion about the resurrection from the dead – that is, until you discuss the teaching of the immortality of the soul.

To some, the issue is simple: based on the greatest wisdom this world has had to offer, man was made to live forever. Man's soul is the *real person* and is *incapable of dying*; therefore, man is believed to be a *soul* that has a body, not a body that has a soul. The difference between the two is simple: if man *is* a soul, then the *real person is* the soul, not the body in which it is encased. If man is a soul that has a body, then the death of the body is of little consequence because the soul *does not die*. It is *incapable of dying* because it is immortal. You have, no doubt, heard this at funerals when the minister pointed to the casket and said: “This is the *body* which dearly departed So-and-So cast off when s/he went to be with Jesus in heaven.” By saying this, the minister was affirming/confirming the faith of the congregants that dear old So-and-So is not *really dead* – in fact, did not *really die*; s/he merely chucked the body before leaving the earth’s environs and going to heaven – an impossible undertaking, they believe, until the body dies.

Any who have read Plato’s work *Phaedrus* will understand this concept for which he is generally credited as the being author – which he actually learned from the Egyptians and the Eleusinian and Orphic mystery religions that emanated out of the Babylonian Mystery Religions. Plato said that: (a) the soul *pre-exists* with

God; (b) it is *uncreated* – which presupposes that it has existed for eternity alongside God; and, (c) when it “falls” from its heavenly heights, it needs a human body (preferably a philosopher or artist) to help it regain its wings so it can soar back to its heavenly heights. This concept presupposes that the immortal soul exists *first* and is at some point put into a human body until that body dies and releases it. This creates numerous other questions about man and his supposed innate immortality: going immediately to heaven or hell at death (the reward of the “saved” or “unsaved”), reincarnation, limbo, purgatory, et cetera.

But, what is the *real issue*? Does God’s word address what man is and what happens to him when he dies? Remember well Plato’s concept because it is a key component in Traditional Christian theology. It is a concept that must be discussed if we are to understand what the *real issue* is regarding why man exists. Why? Because much of the Greek and Roman religion, philosophy, government, and education have been inculcated into modern European-descended societies.

Regarding man’s existence, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:46: “*The spirit body did not come first; the physical body came first. The spirit body will come later.*” What is the *real issue* here? *When a person receives immortality.* Your next question should be: Does this agree with the popular concept taught in Traditional Christianity (stated above) and other world religions? Read Paul’s complete answer in verses 35-50, which begins with the analogy of a dead seed.

In a process, there is a sequence in time for each step to occur. So, Paul gave the answer in verses 46-50 about man bearing the earthly image *first* and *then* the spiritual image. But, notice in verses 35-54 how plainly he demonstrated the *process*: (a) a seed must “die” and be planted in order for it to be made alive again; (b) there is a difference between the natural, corruptible body that is “sown” (that is, buried in the grave) and the spiritual, incorruptible body that will *emerge from the grave*; (c) we are like Adam in that

we have *earthly* bodies (that is, we are made of the dust of the earth like Adam – see Genesis 2:7 and 3:19; also, Psalm 103:13-18); (d) we *shall be* like Jesus Christ was *after His resurrection* and have a *heavenly* (that is, a *spiritual*) body; (e) this will occur only *when Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God*; and (f) since flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (that is, be in the God Family – see Hebrews 2), *the mortal must put on immortality, and the corruptible must put on incorruption* because it does not presently have it. It is self-evident that it must be *put on* if you do not presently have it. Consider this point very carefully – it is a key to understanding this important biblical truth. *Understand what the real issue is!*

Paul wrote that the physical body *ultimately* must be changed *from flesh to spirit* because “*...at the last trumpet...the mortal must put on immortality...*” (v. 53). This is an echo of what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:1-8: “Flesh gives birth to flesh; Spirit gives birth to spirit. You must be *born again*” (emphasis added). If that is true, could man *presently* be *an immortal soul*? No! Once you understand that man is *mortal* and cannot put on immortality *until Christ returns*, all other questions about the immortality of the soul and what happens immediately after you die are totally unnecessary. Knowing what the *real issue* is helps to cut straight through all of the arguments about the immortal soul and the accompanying issues. And, knowing what the Bible actually says makes a great deal of difference in the wisdom of your argument, too.

When one confronts the *real issue* head-on, it holds him to a well-de-defined standard of belief and conduct. Not everyone is willing to be held to well-defined standards of belief and conduct. Some are even content to accept supposed contradictions in God’s word and allow God to be made a liar. Jesus acknowledged that the *real issue* has been withheld from many because they are not willing to be obedient in the face of it (Matthew 13:10-15). He also acknowledged that many have blurred or completely set aside the *real issue* in favor of their own ideas and traditions (Matthew

15:3-20). So, if you know that many of the so-called “early Church fathers” – like Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine of Hippo – were neo-Platonists and that they applied Greek philosophical and religious concepts to their personal concepts of Christianity, then you would know that their writings would be suspect in light of Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and Jeremiah 10:1-3a: *Don’t learn the ways of the heathen and apply them to God’s truth!*

Matthew 15:3-20 is an example of another problem with the real issue. Many have used this one to teach that Jesus took this opportunity to proclaim that it is now permissible for man to eat all manner of flesh that God had declared as unclean in the Old Testament (see Leviticus 11). In effect, they say, Jesus Christ wipes out an entire section of God’s Law because of a dispute about washing one’s hands in an elaborate ceremony before eating. But, was that the real issue here? Or, was the issue as simple as answering this question: *What makes a person unclean?* Is it what enters his body through food and drink that makes one unclean? No. What is in his heart is what makes him unclean. It is in the heart (his mind and will) of man that the fountain of man’s wickedness exists. External things like dirty hands do not make a man unclean! Read the entire account very carefully.

A parenthetical statement in the Revised Standard Version’s translation of Mark’s account (7:19) muddies the waters a bit: “(Thus He declared all *meats* clean.)” The King James Version only reads: “...goeth out into the draught, purging all meats.” What is the difference? The parenthetical statement in the RSV and others gives one the idea that Jesus, therefore, wiped out an entire section of the Law that He gave to Moses when He was in the person of the Lord God of the Old Testament (that is, Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21 – the laws about clean and unclean flesh). The KJV translation gives one the idea that the way uncleanness is purged from the body is *via a bowel movement*. Whatever is taken into the body serves a nutritional purpose or it is discarded. Which

one is the correct understanding? What is the question set before Jesus Christ in this incident?

Adam Clarke makes the following comment about this: “...What is separated from the different aliments taken into the stomach, and thrown out of the body [via a bowel movement], is the innutritious [sic] parts of all the meats [that is, *foods*] that are eaten; and thus they are purged, nothing being left behind but what is proper for the support of the body” (*Adam Clarke's Commentary: One-volume Edition*, Baker Book House, p. 842). Others make sweeping comments about how Jesus’ comment wiped out an entire section of the Law given by God to Moses.

Here’s how you settle this issue: get yourself a dependable Greek-English lexicon and find out which Greek word is translated as *meat* in this scripture. When Adam Clarke used the word *meats*, he was speaking of *foods*, not *flesh*. Of what was Jesus speaking? I looked into my *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* and found the word used in Jesus’ statement: *broma*. I then looked up *broma* in my *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon* and found this very plain, short definition: “...food...Esp. solid food.” It goes on to explain that the *modern* Greek meaning of *filth* and *stench* are most unlikely part of the definition in Mark 7:19. So, I asked myself: Why would it be necessary for Jesus to declare all solid foods *clean*? The word does not seem to mean *flesh*.

There are certain meats, that is, *flesh*, which He, as the Lord God of the Old Testament, declared *unclean*. So, why go through this explanation just to declare all *solid foods* clean? Also, why would He say that He did not come to abolish the Law (Matthew 5:17) – if He does exactly that by declaring *unclean flesh* now permissible to eat?” Do you grasp the nature of the contradiction involved? Yes, *flesh* can be included as a category of solid foods. But the Lord God did not declare all flesh unclean in Leviticus 11 – only certain types. Therefore, I am suspicious of those who claim that Jesus wiped out a significant portion of the Law just because of a conversation about dirty hands! He said in Matthew

5:18 that not one jot or one tittle would be excluded from the Law until (a) heaven and earth pass away and (b) all of it is fulfilled. Neither of those conditions has occurred.

Then I looked up some scriptures where the term *flesh* is used to describe flesh taken in as food. The Greek word used is *kreas*. In Romans 14:21 Paul says: “It is good neither to eat *flesh* [*kreas*], nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.” In 1 Corinthians 8:13 he says: “If meat [*broma*] makes my brother offend others, I will eat no flesh [*kreas*] while the world exists, lest I make my brother offend others [by doing so].” It is possible that Paul is using *broma* in 1 Corinthians 8:13 to include *flesh* because he subsequently says *kreas* (flesh). I won’t explain either situation at this point, but suffice it to say that I have made a distinction between the word Jesus used for *solid food* and the one Paul used for *flesh*.

As *proof* that Jesus did away with the law of unclean *flesh*, many refer to Acts 10. Peter is shown a vision of a sheet being lowered. As it is lowered, he sees all manner of unclean animals. Three times a voice from God tells him to kill and eat these unclean animals – something specifically prohibited by Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Three times Peter refuses to do so, stating that he has *never* eaten anything common or unclean. Three times he is told not to consider as unclean the things that God considers to be clean. According to Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, God considered those animals in the vision as being *unclean*. Again, was He here making void His own Law? What exactly is the issue here? Let the Bible explain it to you.

Look at Acts 10:28 where Peter said: “...*You know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God has shown me* [that is, God revealed to him in the vision about the sheet and the unclean animals] *that I should not call any man common or unclean.*” Why? Verses 15 and 16 tell you that ***three times*** God showed Peter the vision to impress upon him that “*You are not to consider common*

or unclean what God has cleansed." If God considers a person clean, regardless of his nationality, is he to be accepted by all those who claim to be God's people? Yes. Who decides whether a *person* is unclean? God.

Had God here changed His mind about a law He had previously given Israel about the relative cleanliness or uncleanness of other nations? No. Search the Old Testament until you are blue in the face, and you will not find any law of God forbidding social intercourse with other nations. He forbade adopting their *religious practices*, but not having social intercourse with them. This was a social custom adopted by the Jews after their 70 years of Babylonian captivity in an effort to build a "fence" around God's written Law so they could, hopefully, avoid breaking it and incurring His wrath. It was *Jewish* law, not *God's*.

What came after the vision? A request by a Gentile that Peter visit him in his home (vv. 19-22). But, Jews considered Gentiles to be unclean – therefore, Peter was not permitted to enter his home and socialize with him. Some said they were created to fuel the fires of hell! *But...*how could the gospel of salvation and the Kingdom of God be presented to them if such a gross prejudice was held concerning them? Read verses 34-48 and compare that to Matthew 28:19-20 and Galatians 3:8, 28-29. Is this incident about God voiding His law about eating animals He considers unclean? No. This process is how to get to the *real issue* in scripture.

So, what do you think Jesus' object lesson was about – how one's system is purged of things that come into one's mouth, or doing away with the law concerning unclean flesh? If you eat unclean animals, your carnal inclination would be to defend your practice and make the wrong choice about the *real issue*. If you are spiritually honest, you will see that the issue has nothing to do with Jesus doing away with a sizeable portion of God's Law. Matthew 5:17 is a direct quote from Jesus Himself that He did not come for the purpose of abolishing God's law! Do you *believe* Him?

The Interpreter's Bible adds this comment: “Many interpretations have been given to [the RSV translation of Mark 7:19], which may be a gloss [that is, an explanatory note that was not part of the original manuscript was put into the margin of a manuscript by a copyist]” (vol. 7, p. 753; emphasis added). With that information before me, I must make a rational and logical decision about what I will believe as God’s truth – even if it means disagreeing with some very prominent ministers and theologians past and present. Does that make me smarter than them? In one sense, perhaps – but remember: It is God’s truth, not mine.

I have before me the facts that: (a) Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law; (b) the word *broma* (solid foods) is used in Matthew and Mark – not *kreas* (flesh); (c) Peter’s vision was preparing him for meeting a Gentile because God was opening the door for the salvation of the Gentiles; and (d) the parenthetical clause is, in all likelihood, a marginal note by a copyist that was later moved from the margin into the text – it was not part of the original inspired text. My conclusion, then, is that these scriptural situations are not about abandoning God’s law about unclean flesh. I conclude that I am not free to eat just any kind of flesh I want to eat – even if it is good and nutritious. The law is still valid because it is God’s revealed will – and...heaven and earth have not passed away and all of the intents and purposes of God’s law have not been fulfilled. It’s that simple. That’s how you discover the *real issue!*

Rule #2: Understand the Entire Matter

There is an abundance of ignorance in the world because many people either will not or cannot see the *whole picture* of why we exist and what we are supposed to accomplish because of our existence. Because of this, they remain blind to God’s plan and will. If we are to ponder and weigh our answers, surely we must know rule #2: *Understand the entire matter before we answer anything*

about it! Proverbs 18:13 says that it is excessively costly and unprofitable to talk about something about which you know little or nothing. Being able to speak wisely and intelligently requires considerable concentration and reliance upon God for the Spirit of Truth as we study God's word (John 14:26). Having very little knowledge of a matter does not put you into a position to discuss it intelligently. That's a vain exercise like trying to catch the wind!

God has an interesting way of presenting the whole picture to His people. Many do not believe that God's way is a realistic approach because they ignore its simplicity. Here is God's way of presenting the whole picture: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.* For precept must be upon precept...line must be upon line...here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:9-10). It is evident here that spiritual novices have not yet seen enough of the whole picture – that they must gain spiritual maturity in order to understand the weightier matters of spiritual truth. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews that those who use *milk* are not skillful in the word of righteousness because they are *mere spiritual infants*. *Strong meat* belongs to those who have become spiritually mature by habitually using and living by the instructions they have received (see vv.13, 14).

Isaiah 28:9, 10 makes it abundantly clear to the hearing ear and the seeing eye that God does not hide all of His wisdom and truth in one place in His word. It is strewn throughout all of the inspired scriptures. It is also apparent that one must learn it systematically. The various situations represented in all parts of the scriptural record represent illustrations of God's revelation of Himself to mankind and how given situations were handled according to the determinate will of God. God's truth is a *body of truth* that consists of many parts and concepts – none of them having *full* meaning except in context with the *body of truth*. I cannot take one part and separate it from the body, teach it in isolation from the body, and be credited with teaching God's *whole truth*. It is systematically

built line upon line, precept upon precept, from one place in scripture to another. Doing away with portions of God's inspired truth simply because they do not agree with or uphold *your* theological paradigm is not acceptable. The "whole picture" of God must be investigated and considered when searching for God's truth.

Also, there is a price to be paid for receiving that wisdom and understanding: *God expects obedience to the truth that is revealed.* Notice verses 11 and 12. The gist of these two verses is that God's word becomes so much gobbledegook to those *who are not obedient.* Why? Verse 12 shows that He attempts to reveal His truth to them, *but they will not listen!* What is the result? The spreading out of His wisdom throughout the scriptures becomes a snare and a trap to them – which, in effect, causes them to "...fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (v. 13). Half-truth does not work.

Nor does it work to twist and pervert it. Some will come with a few scriptures from which to pick and choose what they will teach as truth and doctrine – what we might refer to as "proof texts"; others will come with neatly laid out scenarios that *seem right* and that stack scripture upon scripture in order to "prove" their validity (read Proverbs 14:12 at this point). All of that avails very little in spreading the truth if they don't know the *real issue*.

The result is that they certainly won't know or understand the *whole picture*, either. It is God's spiritual gift to the mature Christian to be able to recognize their falsehoods and deceptions – something the immature might very well miss and by which they might very well be led astray (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Please notice how I refer you to various parts of scripture relating to comments I am making. This is a working example of "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little."

We must become spiritually mature by learning God's truth precept upon precept, line upon line. These precepts will be bound together in unity, consistency, and truth. There will be no contradictions. The Bereans set the best example by searching the *whole*

scriptures (they, of course, had only the Old Testament) in order to get the *whole* picture (Acts 17:10, 11). An incomplete search will not work. You will get only an incomplete picture. Spiritual maturity comes from being “weaned” from the “milk” of the word. Paul told the Hebrews that every one that uses *milk* is *unskillful* in the word of righteousness (5:13). Proverbs 4:7 says that wisdom is the principal thing in life to acquire; therefore, get *wisdom*. But... along with acquiring wisdom, you should also get *understanding*. So, the Christian’s first responsibility is to learn what the real issue is and, thereby, to understand the whole picture. How do you do that?

Needless to say, I suppose, some people simply do not know how to study things systematically. The process of getting the whole picture includes: (a) *reading* (1 Timothy 4:13), (b) *careful consideration* (2 Timothy 2:7), (c) *search and inquiry* (1 Peter 1:10, 11), (d) *diligence in study* (1 Timothy 4:15b; 2 Timothy 2:15-19), (e) *meditation* (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8; 1 Timothy 4:15a), (f) *memorization* (Psalm 119:11), and (g) *learning from God-inspired teachers* in oral and written form (Philippians 4:9; 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29; Galatians 6:6). The overall goal in all of this is for *the Lord to give you understanding in everything* (2 Timothy 2:7). Each of these points deserves some broader explanation, so I will discuss them individually in more detail in the next chapter.

Rule #3: Understand the Difference between Commandment and Non-commandment

There are areas of God’s word where we are *commanded* to obey – or suffer certain consequences. There are other areas where we are allowed to make decisions for ourselves. Not understanding the difference between the two can make for lots of unnecessary torment and guilt – not to mention all of the attendant problems that accompany those things. Here’s the wisdom and understanding that is required: there are some things we cannot decide for

ourselves and some things that we may decide for ourselves. So, the next rule (#3) for effective Bible study is this: *Learn the difference between commandment and non-commandment.*

Before entering this discussion, we must examine a statement by Jesus Christ so we can have a good reference point on which to base it. Jesus made some interesting points in Matthew 5:17, 18 to which we should pay attention. First, He said that He **did not** come as the Christ to *destroy* the Law or the prophets. The Greek word translated as *destroy* is *kataluo*. Its definition flies in the face of the common concept in Traditional Christianity that the Law has been “nailed to the cross” and done away with. They wrongly interpret the meaning of Colossians 2:14 in coming to that conclusion. *Kataluo* means to *do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid, and repeal*. So, Jesus plainly said that He **did not** come to do that to either the Law or the prophets (see also Matthew 22:34-40). Do you trust Jesus to mean what He says – to tell you the truth? If not, further discussion will be an exercise in futility. The truth is that He meant to leave the Law and the prophets intact for the Church to use in proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom – then and now.

Next, when He used the terms *jot and tittle*, He was referring specifically to the *written Law and prophets* – not the oral law. That means that you have a written record of the Law and the prophets in the Old Testament of your Bible. It has not been abolished, as some wrongly suppose. It is part of that God-inspired scripture that Paul told Timothy is profitable for teaching true doctrines, refuting and correcting erroneous teachings and beliefs, refuting deceivers, and giving instruction in righteousness and Godly living (see 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Paul was referring specifically to the Old Testament because that was all the scripture he had!

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul addressed the issue of marriage relations between Christians. In regard to his instruction about rendering sexual dues to one another, he said: “I speak this *by permission* [from God], and *not by commandment*” (v. 6). In regard to di-

orce, he said: "...Unto the married *I command*, yet *not I*, but the *Lord...*" (v. 10). In regard to whether virgins should marry in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ, he said: "Now concerning virgins *I have no commandment of the Lord*: yet *I give my judgment as one that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*" (v. 25). His judgment was that it really did not matter, but it might be good to stay single so they could devote themselves to Christ's service. Were they obligated to remain single? No. So, what does this teach us about studying the Bible – about knowing the difference between commandment and non-commandment?

There are things that are clearly commanded for all people of all ages. The most obvious example of that would be the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17). There were things that were commanded of Israel as a covenant nation that have no application to our present-day situation – the structure of the Tabernacle and the nature of its furnishings is an excellent example (Exodus 25-30; 36-40). Another example would be the organization of the tribes and the marching orders (Numbers 1-3). There were things commanded that are written in scripture in incomplete form – leaving us with no way to understand or obey: for example, the formula for the oil used to anoint various things associated with the Tabernacle. How could we get the mixture correct today? Correct mixture and proper usage are very important pieces of the puzzle (Exodus 30:22-38)! But, there is no Tabernacle or Temple.

We are obligated to obey those things that are clear and those that are obviously applicable in today's situations. We are under no obligation to force scripture and wrestle meaning out of something that is unclear and/or incomplete. In situations not covered by commandment, we can use our own judgment, tempered with wisdom and righteousness and based on scriptural principles. For example: the Bible nowhere specifically addresses the issue of smoking, dipping, or chewing tobacco, but it does tell us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Would it make sense to

virtually destroy that body with the attendant effects of tobacco? No. Neither are we allowed to use our own judgment to pervert or annul the commandment of God – as many have done in changing the weekly seventh-day Sabbath to worship on the first day of the week, as well as doing away with God’s Holy Days (Exodus 20:8; Leviticus 23). Those who made the change claim to have been given the authority to do so. Really? Based on what?

Knowing the Real Issue, Getting the Whole Picture, and Knowing the Difference Between Commandment and non-Commandment are the first three rules that we should apply in our study of the Bible. They are ultra-important in our search for God’s truth so that we can faithfully deliver it to an unconverted world – or to a world in which God’s truth has been grossly misrepresented or destroyed. We have been commissioned by God to “...correctly explain the pattern of the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15; emphasis added) and to “...prove all things; hold fast to that which is good...” (1 Thessalonians 5:21; emphasis added). How do you do that if you subtly or blatantly eliminate vitally important pieces of the pattern?

Can you always prove enough to keep yourself in the correct pattern of the true faith? Can you avoid the syndrome in which you would be “...ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...” (2 Timothy 3:7)? What methods would you employ in order to understand the correct pattern or prove the truth? These are very important questions to consider – and you must keep them in the forefront of your mind as you search God’s word for the answers to fundamental questions about why we are here, what we are, where we will go when our lives are over, the existence of God, His Christ, and His Church, and Bible’s truth.

Rule #4: Understand *A Priori*

Rule #4 involves an interesting word: *a priori*. *A priori* involves drawing conclusions based on self-evident factors. It also

involves drawing conclusions independent of experience. It is *deductive reasoning*; that is, reasoning based on various known facts/truths. The example of the silence of the Bible on the subject of tobacco usage was an exercise in *a priori* reasoning. Knowing what we know about various other situations in God's word, it would be reasonable to conclude that God would not condone the use of tobacco in its various forms: smoke, dip, chew. This involves being able to see and understand patterns of thoughts in order to derive that which is self-evident.

There are certain ideas about studying God's word that should be self-evident. In all conversations about this, there must be kept in the back of one's mind the simple fact that God expects you to be *obedient* to the truth that He reveals to you through His word or His servants (Isaiah 28:11, 12). Without that willingness and commitment to be obedient, you about as well get your religion from the Sunday comic strips! If you won't commit to being obedient, there's no sense in even trying to teach you about truth and spiritual maturity! That is self-evident!

Isaiah also provided another piece of instruction that should be self-evident: "To the *Law* and to the *Testimony*: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:16; emphasis added). Beware of those who would do away with the foundational truths presented in the Old Testament. That foundation is necessary in order to support the edifice that is built upon it. If you destroy the foundation, you will destroy the edifice (Matthew 5:17-19; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Here's an example: How would I build a case for opposition to something like abortion? Does God's word specifically condemn the practice? A search of an exhaustive concordance like *Strong's*, which is based on the King James Version, will not reveal the usage of the word anywhere in the text of the Old or New Testaments. To be opposed to it *in truth*, then, would mean that you would have to derive your truth from that which is *self-evident* in scripture.

The primary question involved in justifying abortion centers around when *life* begins. Here are some of the arguments. First, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (August 2005), in an article titled “Fetal Pain: A Systematic Multi-disciplinary Review of the Evidence,” states that the fetus does not feel pain before the 29th or 30th week. It is for that reason that doctors do not feel it necessary to anesthetize the fetus before removing it from the womb and destroying it. They conclude that, since the fetus does not respond to pain stimuli, it has not developed the functional thalamocortical connections required to do so. It is, therefore, not a *viable* human being and to abort it is not really killing a human being.

Pro-abortionists often argue that, in the early stages of pregnancy, the embryo is merely a “blob of tissue” – that it is more like a tadpole than a human. They set benchmarks by which to determine the beginning of life: (a) when movement is felt, (b) when the first breath is drawn outside the womb, or (c) when the fetus is viable on its own (Douglas Winnail, *Tomorrow’s World: “Abortion: A Modern Holocaust?”*, March-April 2005, p. 11). There is one more that I have found particularly troubling.

Several years ago when Bill Clinton was President, he was involved in a forum with some college and university students – part of which involved a discussion about abortion (I think partial-birth abortion also entered into the discussion). One student in particular took President Clinton to task about his pro-abortion stance. In order to justify his position, the President asked the student to answer a question – the answer would, it seemed, justify a pro-abortion stance, as well as a partial-birth approach to it. Here’s the question posed by the President: “When does the *soul* enter the body?” Now, the inference is that absent a *soul* you are not dealing with a human being! From where might that reasoning have come?

This is mere speculation, but it is important to the context of the matter at hand. In his book, *The Baptist Faith and Message*

(Convention Press, Nashville, 1971), which is based on the doctrinal platform adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1971, Herschel H. Hobbs set forth the statements of faith they agreed upon by consensus that year. In the introduction of the book, he clearly stated that “Such statements have never been regarded as complete, infallible statements of faith, nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority” (p. 4). Nevertheless, let’s consider what they generally agreed upon in their discussion about what man is. Because of sin, “...man’s *animal principal of life* shall cease; his body shall return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). *But his soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be*” (p. 51; emphases added). Bill Clinton claimed to have been a Southern Baptist. One would assume that he espoused the general Southern Baptist theology described here. What is the point?

If you believe that the body is basically a *house* for the *real person* (the soul), then it is of little consequence if the body is terminated before the *real person* actually enters it. President Clinton’s question insinuated as much – as well as the fact that the soul is not deposited into the body until the fetus is taken *completely* from the body and breath is taken in for the first time.

Hobbs continued his definition of man by saying: “Man is two-fold in nature. He is both spirit and body. *Man is not a body and has a soul. He is a soul and has a body*” (*Ibid.*; emphases added). So, according to this doctrinal statement, the *real person* is an immortal soul; the body is merely a place for it to dwell until the body dies from one cause or another. The *real person* never dies because s/he is immortal – incapable of dying! All of this notwithstanding, I do not perceive that Southern Baptists as a body of believers are pro-abortionists. But their historical stance on the soul’s competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer makes it possible for any who are so persuaded to be pro-abortionists. The concept of the *priesthood of the believer* is a Lutheran argument that every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and, therefore, has the right to read and interpret scrip-

ture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads. It is a good, religious sound byte – but it is not in any way supported by scripture.

I wrote President Clinton and expressed my personal opposition to his reasoning. I told him that he had entered into a theological question that is clearly not accepted by all people of faith. As President of the United States, his job is to defend the Constitution of the United States and not put himself in the position of pushing his personal religious beliefs off on the general public – that is, there is definite concern expressed in the Constitution regarding the separation of Church and State. The President's concern with Constitutional matters includes defending our unalienable rights – rights that cannot be abridged or terminated – to *life*, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. I asked why the unborn's right to life should not be similarly protected. He did not pursue the issue with me; his office sent a pre-printed, stock card thanking me for my input.

So, the question before you is this: Does the Bible support any of these so-called benchmarks that are used to determine when *life* begins? When, according to the Bible, does *life* actually begin? Is there any indication in scripture that God considers a fetus a *living being*? Is the pro-abortion movement *really* about life – or is it about something entirely different?

About one in four pregnancies is ended by abortion – about 40 to 50 million occur around the world every year (Winnail). Does each and every one of these represent the necessity of taking a drastic measure to save the mother's life? Hardly! It is pregnancy termination on demand; it is, primarily, *birth control*. And...if these fetuses represent individual *lives*, then humanity is guilty of infanticide on a greater scale than anything we have ever witnessed in history! Those so righteously indignant about Hitler's holocaust pay scant attention to it. What is supposed to have been a drastic measure to protect the health and well-being of a mother whose life is endangered by the pregnancy has actually become another method of birth control and population control foisted off on a gullible, self-centered world as being no more serious than getting

rid of an appendix or a hang-nail (*Ibid.*). It has come to be the great symbol of a woman's right to control her own body. It has evolved into a means by which stem cells can be harvested to help find cures for various birth defects, diseases, and injuries – what might amount to nothing more or less than harvesting body parts. And, some cosmetic companies actually use human tissue from aborted fetuses in the manufacture of their face creams (*Ibid.*)! It is a way that *seems* right, but scripture does not support the practice (*Proverbs 14:12*).

Let's consider the logic of the various benchmarks. Does the fetus *move* before the mother actually feels it? Yes – several weeks before. Why should it not be considered a sign of *life* if the mother has not felt it? It can be observed by modern technology. Whether voluntary or involuntary, the fetus has at least some measure of nerve pathways that induce the movement. We also have to remember that the fetus is a life-form that is developing inside the womb. It is not viable in the womb, but it cannot immediately survive outside the womb, either! Many mammals need the continued support of the mother once separated from the womb. Why should that not be considered a sign of *life*? What about drawing *breath*? Drawing breath is a means by which the body gathers the oxygen it needs to carry out the various life functions of the body. When the child exits the womb, it has to draw its own supply because it is no longer connected to the mother's supply. Even though the fetus gets its nourishment and oxygen from the mother – and eliminates waste through the mother's system – from conception it is a genetically unique individual; that is, it has its own peculiar genetic identity that is made up from hereditary factors from both parents. While the make-up is similar to both parents, it is, nevertheless, unique.

It is a life-form that operates independently within the mother even though it is dependent on the mother to be a supplier of its various needs – just as it is for awhile outside the womb. It is interesting, therefore, that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would write

this: “Death during embryonic life...does not differ fundamentally from death at other times during the life cycle...it is not surprising that embryonic death rates, where they are known, are generally higher than juvenile death rates” (v. 9, p. 205, 1969 edition; emphases added). These three benchmarks do not determine the *beginning of life*. The time that passes between conception and parturition is most definitely part of a *life cycle*. As one of my college psychology professors was fond of saying: “The secret of *life* is simple: At the point of conception, your state is *fetal!*” How can there be *death* without *life*?

Scripturally speaking, Leviticus 17:11 says: “...The *life* of a creature is in the blood....” My question is: *When does the creature receive the blood?* When fertilization occurs, the uniting of the sperm and the egg forms a one-cell entity called a *zygote*. This zygote will have 46 chromosomes – 23 from the male and 23 from the female. These chromosomes contain genetic material that determines the individuality of the baby: the gender, eye color, hair color, height, facial features, and (in part) the personality and intelligence (revolutionhealth.com). This is testimony to God’s creative genius so elegantly expressed in Isaiah 44:2 and Jeremiah 1:5: “*I formed you* in the womb” (emphasis added). It is in the womb that the individuality of the person is established – at the point of fertilization. Had some other sperm gotten there first, *you* would not exist! As this zygote enters into a rapid division to form a cluster of cells, the inner portion will become the embryo, and the outer portion will protect and nourish it. This process takes about a week – the first week after conception (*Ibid.*).

During the second week after conception, when the embryo is 1/25th of an inch long, the heart and a primitive circulatory system are formed. At week three, when the baby is 1/17th of an inch long, the blood vessels will complete a circuit (that is, become the circulatory system), and the heart will begin to beat. This makes the circulatory system the first functioning organ system. While you cannot yet hear the heartbeat, the motion can be detected by an

ultrasound exam (*Ibid.*). This means that blood is flowing through the baby's system driven by its own heartbeat. Does that mean that God would accept aborting the fetus within the first three weeks after conception? No – and for very good reason.

In Genesis 1:28, part of God's plan for mankind (male and female) was that they would "...be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...." The implication found in the word *replenish* is that they would fill the earth *again*. God (Elohim) had originally created the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1) to be complete and inhabitable – not in chaos and confusion (Isaiah 45:18). Something happened to cause the earth to become "...without form and void..." – in other words, chaotic and disorderly; uninhabitable (Genesis 1:2: the verb *was*, in this context, means *to become* and *came to be*). Now, God intended for man to be engaged in managing the life of the earth and to bring it under his control. One of the ways by which that would be accomplished was through the multiplication of the numbers of humans to share the workload.

The fact that He created mankind male and female supports the inference that He created within the human body the *potential* of generating life. Adam, who named all of God's creatures (Genesis 2:19,20), also named the woman created from his rib (vv. 21-23). He called her *Eve* (Hebrew = *Chavvah*), which means *Life* and *the mother of all living*. This presents us with a picture of some importance: the female is a *fountain of life*. The average human female has about one to two million immature eggs in her ovaries *when she is born*. Throughout her life, only about 400 or so of them will ever reach maturity. By the time she reaches puberty, only about 400,000 of them remain, and she will lose about 1,000 each time she menstruates (<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/1639.html>). What's the point here? Each egg represents the *potential* of an individual personality and life.

While it is true that millions of the immature, undeveloped ova are sloughed off as the female grows to puberty and begins to menstruate, it was never intended that she should give birth through

each of the one to two million ova – no more than it was intended that all of the male sperm in one ejaculation would be used to fertilize one or more ova. God seems to have been profuse in making it possible for mankind to *multiply*. Once that egg is fertilized, it begins a process that is best described by the Greek term *entelechy*: the “...unfolding of *potential* present right from the beginning” (christiananswers.net).

Potential represents the capability of becoming actual. Romans 4:17 describes God as a Being Who “...calls those things that do not presently exist as though they already do so.” He treats the *potential* as though it *actually exists*. What does the ovum represent? *Life*. Granted, it is only *potential life* until it is fertilized, but my psychology professor was exactly right when he said: “At the moment of conception, your state is fetal.” In other words, it has become the unfolding of an individual personality and *life*. Unless it is terminated for whatever reason, it *will be born* to become an independent human being with the potential of reproducing itself – perhaps numerous times – and continuing the *life cycle*. *All that we are* – potentially and actually – *is part of the life cycle!* Is that something that God values? If so, what should our attitudes be about it? By God’s standard of holiness, does it make sense that He simply allows us to abort a fetus as though it is *nothing*? Even if the pregnancy is accidental? In God’s revelation of what a human being is, it does not include the component called an immortal soul. Bill Clinton and those who believe as he does (did?) notwithstanding, life is life – in the womb or out of it. And...God values *life*. This is the value of recognizing *a priori* – the self-evident.

Finally, it should be self-evident that you must not get entangled in foolish questions and endless arguments. The Apostle Paul warned us to “...avoid foolish and unlearned questions because they stir up strife and controversy...” (2 Timothy 2:23). He also warned us about getting hung up in such things as “...fables and endless genealogies, which raise unnecessary questions that do not educate us in the true faith...” (1 Timothy 1:4). In the end, he

warned us about quarreling with those who are conceited and don't understand anything except how to ask knit-picking questions and to quarrel about meanings of insignificant words. The only thing that comes from such behavior is envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant, perverted quarreling between men of corrupt minds who are destitute of the truth (1 Timothy 6:4, 5; author's paraphrase).

Pay very close attention to those things that should be self-evident in worshiping a *holy* and *righteous* God. God has made many things about His truth self-evident to the point that He holds all of us responsible for understanding them (Romans 1:18-32). Failure to pay attention can be costly.

Rule #5: Learn How to *Prove* God's Word

Thomas is well-known for his doubting attitude. He was told that Jesus was raised from the dead. His attitude was simple: "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my fingers into the nail holes and the gash in His side, *I will not believe it*" (John 20:25; emphasis added). Thomas did not pretend that his doubts did not exist, but he readily and whole-heartedly sought to be obedient once he had *proved* the doubts to be unfounded. He sought the truth about the matter. It is important to realize that his "proof" came to him as a result of his relationship with Jesus. Some things will have to be proved in order to enter that relationship, while others will be proved as a *result* of that relationship. This is a fundamental piece of wisdom. We should understand what it means to *prove* something by God's word. It is crucial to your spiritual growth and development.

When someone wants to prove something, they usually establish a hypothesis (that is, *an assumption about how something might work*) and then begin to gather evidence to determine whether or not the hypothesis is valid. If it is, then a *truth* is constructed to explain the nature of the observed or tested evidence. There-

fore, if you want the truth of a matter, you must line up the evidence discovered in the experiments and draw some kind of conclusion based on it. If you skew the evidence, then the validity of the “truth” derived from it is tainted. This is Paul’s point in Romans 1:18-32. Here’s how that works in proving things about God and Jesus Christ.

There are some preliminary issues that must be established from God’s word from which all else that you might come to believe about God and His purpose is derived. They are as follows: (a) Does God exist? (Hebrews 11:6); (b) Is the Bible God’s word of truth? (Matthew 4:4; Luke 12:48b; John 17:17); (c) What is the role of Jesus Christ? (Philippians 2:5-11); and (d) Where is the Church Jesus said He would build? (Matthew 16:18; 2 Corinthians 11:4-15).

Why are these things important to the study of the Bible? They are the issues that enable you to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. If you don’t believe in God, why would you believe in His Christ? If you don’t believe in God, why would you give any credence to a book that claims to be His direct revelation of Himself to the world? And why would you care if He had a Church or not? Hebrews 11:6 says: “...Without faith it is *impossible* to please [God]: for he that comes to God *must* believe that He exists, and that He is one who rewards them that diligently seek Him.” So, God expects us to gather evidence that will verify the truth about His existence and His plan. He is not interested in *blind faith*. But, what about the *experimentation* part?

There is a related meaning of the term *prove* that we must consider. This meaning has much to do with gathering evidence to determine the validity of the *assumption about the way God works in disclosing His existence and His interest in humankind*. It has to do with getting into a particular relationship in order to build a *history of experiences* that will attest to the reliability of the claims that are made. It has to do with determining whether or not a thing

can do the job it is supposed to be able to do or that it claims to be able to do.

Luke 14:19 gives us an example of this type of proving. A man who had bought a yoke of oxen said, “I am going out to see if they can do the job for which they are intended.” This is very much like taking an automobile out for a test drive – of *testing* a hypothesis! He was not going to prove whether or not they existed. He knew they existed. He was going to enter into a particular relationship with them and see if they could do what they were supposed to be able to do. In like manner, God offers believer and non-believer alike challenges to *test* or *prove* Him to see if He will do the things He is designed to do and has promised to do (for example, Malachi 3:10). This proof comes as a result of *establishing and maintaining a relationship with God* (Deuteronomy 28).

One of the greatest examples of this type of *proving* is shown in the life of Abraham (see Genesis 12-25). The great lesson gleaned from Abraham’s example should be self-evident: faith alone is not enough – you need to demonstrate your faith by acting upon what you have faith in. When James taught that faith without works is dead, he used the examples of Abraham and Rahab to demonstrate what he meant by that. In both cases, James said that it was what they *did* about the things they believed that set them apart as examples worthy of God’s praise. He concluded that, just as the body without breath is dead, faith without deeds based upon it is likewise dead.

The Apostle Paul said the same thing in Romans 4 – except Paul focused on Abraham’s *faith*. If you understand the process correctly, it should be self-evident that Paul knew that Abraham believed *and* acted upon that belief. It is equally self-evident from Romans 3:28 that Paul did not accept the idea that an individual could simply obey the law and cause God to owe him anything. There was no way Abraham could have believed that God would bless him, give him an heir, give him the “promised land,” and then allow Abraham to stay in Haran, instead of leaving his fa-

ther's household as God had told him to do (Genesis 12:1-3). This would be equally true of God's demand that he actually sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19). It is self-evident that Abraham had to *act* upon what he believed – yet, what God promised him was not *owed* to him; it was a product of *grace*: Abraham did not deserve it, could not earn it, and could never repay God for it. This is how Abraham *proved* God's faithfulness to His promises. It was not merely an intellectual acquiescence to a spiritual hypothesis. Abraham could not *show* his faith without going through the actual experimentation. *Doing* what he was told was absolutely necessary.

Matthew 7:21-23 is a lesson about works without the *proper* faith. Jesus says that your works have to *agree* with the will of God the Father. It is not enough to preach in the name of Jesus, cast out demons in His name, and do many wonderful works in His name. The fruit of your actions must *agree* with God's truth (John 4:23, 24) and must be the product of the Spirit of Truth working in you (John 14:15-17, 26; 16:13-15). You are not allowed to skew the evidence to make it say what it does not reveal (see Romans 1:18-25). That includes *ignoring* numerous parts of God's word and treating them as though they never existed – which many do when they claim that the Law of God was nailed to the cross! This would not be a problem if they understood more completely the real issue, the entire matter, the purpose served by God's law, how to recognize that which is self-evident, and how to *prove* God by doing what He requires us to do. You should be able to see that worshiping God in spirit and in truth is more than getting a warm and fuzzy spiritual feeling. Such would not be a problem if they had a sound study method.

Rule #6: Develop a Sensible Method of Studying

First Thessalonians 5:21 admonishes us to *examine and put to the test* all things. If one wants to test an idea about something in

relationship to the word of God, they should use a sound method that can be used by anyone with reasonable ability to carry out a search of the scriptures. In the research process, this would be like examining the literature to see where others have written about how they have tested a similar hypothesis – or a related hypothesis – and understand their conclusions based on their experiences. One does not need to get caught up in some fancy-schmancy methodology that serves more to confuse than to enlighten. Coming to understand truth does not need to be difficult or unpleasant. Here are some easy-to-follow steps that will serve as a basic methodology for examining the scriptures in a sensible manner:

Step #1: What does the Bible say?

This is simple enough, right? But many wrestle with the concept and end up perverting what the Bible actually says. Let's take a test flight. What does Jesus *say* in Matthew 5:17-19? Based on what it *says*, would you accept the traditional teaching – supposedly based on Colossians 2:14 – that the Law has been done away with through the death of Jesus Christ – having been “nailed to the cross”? What else would you look up in order to see what the Bible *really* says? What would you believe about Colossians 2:14 as compared to Matthew 5:17-19?

Would you believe that Paul had a new revelation – or that he double-crossed Jesus? Or, would you believe that Paul is talking about another issue altogether? How would this compare to Isaiah 8:16? Would you believe that the Law and the Prophets are no longer applicable to what God expects of us? What did Christ mean in Luke 24:44 when He said: “...All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me?” Have they been fulfilled? Completely? Can you find *anything* that has not yet been fulfilled? Has Jesus returned to set up God’s kingdom? Have death and the grave

been thrown into the Lake of Fire? Have heaven and earth passed away?

There are many other examples of this type in traditional beliefs. For example, what does the Bible *say* about the change of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday? Does any *specific* commandment by Jesus Christ or God the Father support the change? Look up what the Bible *says* about the doctrine of the immortal soul. Is it there anywhere – or is this simply the imposition of man’s ideas upon the message about life after death as found in God’s word?

Step #2: Check the Context.

Ask all of the news reporter questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Can you tell, after answering all of these questions, what is going on? If you have checked a commentary for help, can you see where the author has stated any contradictions to the plain statements of the scriptures? If so, then you can dismiss those statements from consideration immediately.

Read above and below the scriptural focal point. You cannot rely on something that is taken out of the context in which it is written. For example, traditional teachings use 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, along with other scriptures, to support their idea that there is going to be a *rapture* of all Christians about seven years before the actual return of Jesus Christ. If you have read the *Left Behind* series, then you are familiar with the concept. In that theory, *no Christian* will have to endure the tribulation period. It’s a wonderful thought. But...is it *true*?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 aloud very carefully. What is the context of Paul’s instruction? By reading the context, one should be able to see that the context is *the second coming of Jesus Christ* – which, by the way, comes at the *end* of the tribulation period, not before. By reading the context of Revelation 12:12-13:18, one should readily see that *some Christians* will, indeed, go through the tribulation period and many will be martyred! You

should see the consistency of God's word by comparing this to Daniel 7:16-28. You should also be able to read 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 and harmonize it with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. Some have written a great many books and made lots of money from writing and selling the idea of the rapture to people who are unskilled in God's word! It is wise to check the context!

Step #3: Get ALL of the Scriptures.

It is important to apply Isaiah's instruction about "...precept upon precept...line upon line...here a little, there a little" in this case. It is important to check every available angle in searching out the truth. In doing so, you stand a better chance of seeing the pattern God has established – without getting confused with the imposition of man's ideas and traditions.

Purchase an exhaustive concordance so you can find all of the scriptural references you need. Many of them provide definitions and intended meanings within the context in which they are found. Jesus told the Pharisees that scripture cannot be done away with just to protect someone's personal, wrong interpretation (John 10:35). The Apostle Peter said: "No prophecy of the scripture is intended for private interpretation. Historically, prophecy did not come through the will of man; holy men of God spoke it as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 2:20, 21). It is divinely inspired by God Himself – and you should have the faith that God would not allow it to be contradictory.

Step #4: Let the Bible Interpret the Bible.

How do you do this? It is so easy for you to let others tell you what to believe – to go along with the traditional teachings you have heard from family and friends through the years. It is much more difficult to take the time needed to let God's word speak to you. There are four steps in letting the Bible interpret itself: (a)

check all verifiable biblical doctrines; (b) eliminate everything that contradicts biblical definitions; (c) use different translations; and (d) don't try to establish doctrine based on Bible helps and aids.

You can understand that there would be no confusion about the role of God's Law in His New Testament Church if people understood a couple of simple, verifiable doctrines: (a) the Apostle John wrote: "Sin is the transgression of the Law" (I John 3:4); (b) the Apostle Paul wrote: "...The Law defines sin for us....Do we make the Law void just because we are people of faith? God forbid! We establish the Law..." (Romans 3:20, 31); and, (c) the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah wrote: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah [see Ezekiel 37]: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers at the time I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; a covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord: But this shall be the [new] covenant that I will make with the [entire] house of Israel; after those days, says the Lord, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (see also Hebrew 10:1-17). If His law was insignificant enough to abolish, why bring it back in the future?

Now look up God's instruction about the Sabbath and determine if God is more interested in the *rest* factor in the term "sabbath" than He is in the day on which that rest should occur (see Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3). ***Let the Bible interpret the Bible.***

Rule #7: Seek God's Guidance

Jesus promised us that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His name to "...teach you all things and to bring all the things I have said to you into remembrance..." (John 14:26). The Apostle Paul wrote: "...God has revealed [His understanding] to us by His

Holy Spirit..." (1 Corinthians 2:10). If you have failed to include the Author of Truth in your studies, how else would you come to know the truth? The Lord's own brother, James, wrote: "Anyone who lacks wisdom should ask God because He gives generously to all without finding fault in them for doing so. However, when one asks, he must...not doubt because he who doubts...should not think that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is double-minded and unstable in all he does" (James 1:5-7). Ask God for help before you even begin to apply all of the lessons found in this study.

Also, please remember this admonition of the Apostle Paul: "...The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder [that is, piercing to the dividing line between] of soul [*psuche* – physical life] and spirit [*pneuma* – spiritual life], and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). In other words, it distinguishes very aptly between what your *actions* are and what your *intentions* are (see Matthew 5:17-48). Be prepared for God to show you things that you must change about your actions and thoughts and desires and hopes and plans. Be prepared to obey.

Summary

Being a faithful witness to God's truth is a challenge well worth the effort. The danger that is inherent in the process lies in not knowing the real issue, not understanding the whole picture, and not knowing the difference between the commandment of God and the doctrine of man. It also involves being able to understand that which is self-evident in God's word, understanding how to prove God's word by belief, faith, and experience, having a sound method for examining the scriptures, and, most importantly, asking God for His help in the entire process. A faithful witness of God's truth, first and foremost, is commissioned to "correctly explain the pattern of the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) and to "prove all

things; [and] hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

– Two –

Studying the Bible (2)

In the first part of this lesson, it was shown that it is necessary to study God's word *systematically*. While Isaiah 28:10 speaks of "...precept upon precept...line upon line...here a little, and there a little...", the idea is to develop a system or method by which you come to grips with what God's word is all about. There are two major concepts that you must understand in order to reconcile all else in scripture: (a) God's covenant with Abraham (read Romans 4, Galatians 3, and Hebrews 6:13-20) and (b) the appearance of Jesus Christ (read John 5:17-47; Genesis 3:15; 15:1-4; 26:1-4; and Galatians 3:16-22). Here is the rationale: If a *seed* was promised to Adam and Eve, and that *seed* is to come as a result of God's covenant with Abraham, then that is the Bible's *thesis*: a proposition advanced and offered to maintain by *argument*.

Some, at this point, will say: "I don't *argue* about scripture!" Well, if you carry on any kind of conversation in which you set forth reasons for or against believing a certain theological concept, then you *argue*. If you offer a reason as *proof* of something, you *argue*. If you attempt to *persuade*, then you *argue*. The entirety of scripture is an *argument!* In other words, *all of scripture sustains an argument about Jesus of Nazareth being the promised seed and the rightful inheritor of all that God promised Abraham and swore a covenant oath to deliver.* Your task as a seeker of God's

proof is to unravel His *witness* to this fact. You can see an excellent example of this in Acts 8:26-40 where Philip did exactly that from Isaiah 53:7, 8. Such an *argument* is put forward each time a writer of scripture says: “That it might be fulfilled as written by the prophet....” You can find examples of this in places like Luke 24:44, Acts 2:14-40 (Peter), and Acts 26 (Paul).

What follows, then, is instruction about how to *systematize* your study of God’s word in order to keep your focus on the great *thesis* of scripture. This is a method for gathering the *proof* you need to sustain your own *argument* about God’s great revelation of our coming salvation. This instruction is in broad strokes, so be prepared to do the necessary legwork to fill in the blanks. This is part of the process of dealing with meat in due season.

Reading

Paul exhorted Timothy to spend an appreciable amount of time *reading*. Whether this is personal reading or public reading before an audience, reading is stressed as being vitally necessary for obtaining knowledge and understanding. The true faith is one that is built upon the necessity of being literate – able to read and write. I know when I write this that there will be voices that say that people who cannot read and write, with God’s help, can understand His truth. I understand that and admit that it is true. But, the true faith is a religion of *written* revelation: remember Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:17-19 about the permanence of God’s Law – not a *jot* or *tittle* will be removed from it until it is all fulfilled. That is a reference to the *written* testimony of God’s revelation of Himself to mankind.

How much more effective will the learning process be when you can search it out independently and not have to rely on others to read and explain it to you? The disciples were “uneducated” in that they did not get the classic Greek education that someone like Paul got, but they could read and write. Just take the few examples

we have in the production of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude. Add to that the written records given in the Old Testament. What does this suggest to you about being literate?

The story in Acts 8:26-40 about the Ethiopian and Philip is indicative of the necessity of spending an appreciable amount of time reading. The Ethiopian needed someone to explain certain passages from Isaiah's written work – he was *reading*, but not understanding. Had Phillip been *illiterate*, how might his ability to explain Isaiah's writings in relationship to Christ have been hindered or limited? Might someone else who was literate have been used instead? Generally speaking, then, the literate person has more potential of being a broader and more independent learner than does the illiterate or non-reader – that is, he is potentially capable of getting more of the whole picture. I am not saying by this that illiterate people are *useless*. God can and does use, at times, the illiterate in ways beyond comprehension. But...I wonder how many of them remain illiterate after coming into the true faith.

And...your reading need not be confined to the word of God. Paul, evidently, read widely as a result of his education. He cited the writings of others he probably studied. You can get a glimpse of this in his address to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34. I won't belabor the point, but Paul had observed the various gods they worshiped, including a statue labeled *To An Unknown God*. Paul was asked to address them – their great pleasure was to always learn something "new" (v. 21). At the end of his address, having made his point from scripture, he provided an educational "scaffold" for them to relate to: "...In Him [that is, this Unknown God whom Paul claimed to represent] we live, and move, and have our being: *as certain of your poets have said*" (v. 28; emphasis mine). How would Paul have known to use that in his argument if he had not read widely enough? Some of their writings actually *helped Paul to prove his point about their ignorance and superstition!* Just because you become familiar with the writings of others

does not mean that you fall for their religious and/or philosophical paradigms hook, line, and sinker. You are simply adding to your storehouse of knowledge. Read! Read! Read!

Careful Consideration

Careful consideration of the demands and rewards of the true faith is also vitally necessary. In 2 Timothy 2:7, Paul included, with this instruction of practicing *careful consideration*, the hope/desire that *the Lord would give Timothy understanding in all things*. *Consideration* means that you will give careful thought to something – that you will meditate upon it, ponder it, make judgments concerning it, give thoughtful attention to it. Now, practice this admonition. What was Paul’s point? What did he intend to teach Timothy about being a faithful minister (see chapter 1:6 – a reference to the ordination of Timothy into the gospel ministry)? Is this any less required of the true Christian? If so, why? If not, why not? Backtrack in the context of Paul’s letter and see what you find as points of instruction leading up to that conclusion.

In verses 3 and 4, he used the imagery of being “...a good *soldier...*” of Christ. What does that imagery suggest? Unhesitating obedience, perfect loyalty, single-minded and heroic devotion, the ultimate in self-sacrifice, satisfying the demands of the one who enlisted him (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, v. 11, p. 479 – notice that this is a reference to something I *read*). *Careful consideration* will point out that the minister – and no less the true Christian – will not be sidetracked from his given duty by ordinary, day-to-day pursuits because he will realize the nature of the spiritual warfare in which he is engaged.

Would he completely ignore his ordinary duties and pursuits? Not likely. Would he forego marriage and family? Not likely – only if necessary. Would he, as a good soldier, allow himself to be sidetracked from the duties and obligations of his spiritual warfare by those things? Not likely. What are the chances of him becom-

ing *literate* if he obeyed this fully? Great! Surely curiosity and a desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ would be a prod to become literate!

Consider this as well: God has not made it a practice of calling into his work those of great knowledge, great power, or great wealth (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Have there been *any* called out? Yes – but Paul is quick to point out, however, “*...not many...*” (v. 26). Why?

Paul is apparently working from two vantage points in this. Although he did not have Matthew’s gospel handy, he probably understood the mind of Jesus Christ in a situation where He prayed to the Father: “I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have *hidden* these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto *babes....For it seemed good in your sight* [to do so]” (Matthew 11:25, 26; emphasis added). Or, he might have learned from Luke the parable of the great supper where many were invited, but each had his own excuse for not attending. So the master of the house told his servant to “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (Luke 14:16-24). When there was still room for guests, he commanded his servants to go out into the highways and hedges and compel enough people to attend so that his house could be filled (v. 23). Among that diverse, incongruent selection, you would not find many highly educated, powerful, and wealthy people. From where did this lesson originally come?

He might have had in mind Jeremiah 9:23, 24. God was very weary with the sins of the Houses of Israel and Judah. The House of Israel had been removed from the land by Assyria between 721-718 B.C. – never to return (read 2 Kings 15-17 to get the background) – but Judah was not impressed by the punishment meted out to Israel. In Jeremiah 9:12, Jeremiah is moved by God’s spirit to ask: “Who is the wise man who can understand this? Who is he to whom the Lord has spoken so that he can declare why the land

is perishing and burned up like a wilderness to the point that none can pass through it?" Ultimately, in answer to his own question, Jeremiah gives this answer: "Do not let the wise man glory in his wisdom, do not let the mighty man glory in his strength, nor let the rich man glory in his riches. Let him who wants to rejoice in triumph rejoice in this: *that he understands and knows me – that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the Lord*" (vv. 23, 24; emphasis added).

All of the things that seem to be a natural advantage are no advantage at all: in Christ, we are utterly dependent upon God's spiritual gifts – godly wisdom and godly understanding. Why? Because God has chosen the weak and disenfranchised of the world to do a work that will confound the rich and powerful and learned in the ways of the world (v. 27). Then, Paul hit the nail squarely on the head with this: "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

So, what do you think? Will the weak and disenfranchised make any progress to become literate? It appears that it will be inevitable as long as they are faithful and willingly grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, they might very well come to nothing. Being literate and being able to sort out patterns of thought and instruction are great weapons in spiritual warfare! Great tools for putting into action your *careful consideration*.

It is with things like this in mind that you are to give *careful consideration* to the demands and rewards of the true faith. Jesus warned us to count the costs (Luke 14:28-33). We need to carefully consider what it will take to complete a task once it is begun. We need to carefully consider what it will take to win: how much of our own effort...and how much dependence upon God. We need to carefully consider what it will take for us to forsake everything in order to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. These are not things that one should take lightly. They are worthy of and demand our respect. It is when we become careless with God's word and do

not regard it as the foundation of *all truth* that we begin to lose the ability to say with David: “I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for your commandments....I rejoice at your word, as one that has found great spoil” (Psalm 119:131, 162). This is the equivalent to what Christ admonished in Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are they which *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Food and drink are *absolute necessities!*

Search and Inquiry

How much do you wrestle with the *meaning* of scriptures? How much time and effort do you invest in studying through prophecies – attempting to understand how they apply to our present world circumstances? Are you even remotely interested in what God has revealed to His prophets to inform you about things leading up to major world events that will affect all of mankind – or just your particular part of the world – especially, the unfolding of God’s great plan of salvation? If your search and inquiry into the meaning of God’s word is merely superficial – say, for personal devotional purposes only – then you will suffer a level of spiritual ignorance that will not serve you well. Let’s consider 1 Peter 1:10, 11 with this in mind. It is *meaty* in its revelation and implications.

Peter begins this letter with some heavy stuff: (a) an *elect* people according to the *foreknowledge of God the Father*; (b) *sanctification* of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ; (c) *begettal again* unto a lively hope by the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the *dead*; (d) an incorruptible *inheritance* reserved in heaven that is undefiled and eternal; (e) the trial of one’s faith; (f) loving Jesus Christ in spite of not having ever seen Him; and (g) receiving the goal of your faith: the *salvation* you expect through Jesus Christ (vv. 1-9). What does all of this mean? Have you *really* understood God’s truth about them – without the taint of man’s *additions* to and *subtractions* from God’s word?

Peter brings them up as though those who received the letter understand them fully! But...in the context of the entire letter, they are only the *foundational* concepts leading up to his statements in vv. 10 and 11.

Read vv. 10 and 11 carefully: “Of which salvation the prophets have *inquired and searched diligently*, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: *searching* what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it *testified beforehand* the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” (emphasis added). What, exactly, were they using to carry out this *search and inquiry*? Whatever manner of scripture was available to them during their days – some having nothing more than the first five books of the Old Testament; others having nothing more than writings left by previous generations that have since disappeared. They certainly did not have available to them what we have! What greater responsibility do we have with our greater advantage?

The prophets referred to in 2 Chronicles 9:29 are a perfect example of this. Notice: Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo left *writings* (see also 12:15, 13:22; Ezra 5:1; Nehemiah 12:4; and Zechariah 1:1, 7). We presently have scant information about these prophets, much less about their writings. But God’s word says that their *writings* were a source of information for His people at a certain time in history. And...you get the idea that Iddo the prophet was particularly busy, but *his writings are not even preserved as scripture* – which would have made him at least a *minor* prophet like Amos, Hosea, and others. In Luke 1:70, Zacharias, John the Baptist’s father, says that God has had prophets “...since the world began....” Amos wrote that “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, [without] revealing His secret to His servants the prophets” (3:7).

So, Peter explains to us that it was nothing but this hope of the salvation revealed by God that demanded the attention and efforts of the prophets, both to understand it and to pass it along to others in succeeding generations. In spite of the revelation of God and

the Spirit of Christ in them, they still had to *search and inquire* – and...I dare say that they were *driven* by both the revelation and Spirit to make the search and inquiry. Peter says that they wanted to know *when* and *how* God's revelation would be fulfilled. But...Peter also says here that they knew that *these things would not be fulfilled during their time, but in a time in the distant future*. He says that the time has arrived for us to pay more careful attention to these things. What about you? Are you *driven* by what you learn and by the Spirit of God to search and inquire for more understanding? Are you curious about the *when* and *how*? If not, why not?

You are familiar, no doubt, with the Bereans of Acts 17:10, 11. It says of them that they "...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily, [to determine] whether those things [that Paul and Silas preached] were so." There is no way of determining exactly which scriptures they had, but it is safe to assume that it was, at the most, the Old Testament. The key elements of this description are: (a) *readiness of mind* and (b) *searching the scripture daily*. Their concern was not for the novelty subject (what some call *amazing new truths*) – nor was it an on-again-off-again or infrequent approach to reaping the treasures found in holy writ. The synonyms *search* and *inquire* denote a *prolonged search* – an approach not really exercised in a daily devotional format. It is more intense and time-consuming. It might be compared to searching for some great treasure or a lost, prized possession (see Matthew 13:44-46 and Luke 15). These are important concepts to understand.

There is an account in Daniel 9 that gives us an excellent example of a person who regularly involved himself in *search and inquiry*. In v. 2, Daniel says that he "...was perusing [reading attentively] the scriptures, counting the number of years – as revealed by Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah – that were to pass before the successive devastations of Jerusalem would come to an end, namely seventy years" (*The Jerusalem Bible*). The KJV says

that he understood by “*books*.¹” It is not altogether clear whether Daniel used only scriptures from Jeremiah, or if he used other writings from prophets like Iddo. A rather straightforward point is necessitated here: *search and inquiry* need not be limited to scriptures only – a point that I will revisit later in the chapter.

What is the idea presented in Daniel 9? Simply this: As a result of Daniel’s curiosity, prayer, and fasting, he was enabled to be instructed about a greater spiritual meaning that God attached to the lesson of the 70-year captivity of the House of Judah: the Seventy Weeks Prophecy (read vv. 20-27) – a lesson meant for *us*, not Daniel. We, however, must not be led astray by all of the various interpretations men have put to this prophecy through the years.

In another event in Daniel 10-12, Daniel was given a vision about another future event (v. 14). An angelic being said to him: “...From the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to chasten yourself before your God [by fasting and prayer], your words [prayers] were heard, and I have come because of them” (v. 12). Then the angel said something remarkable: “I will show you that which is noted in *the Scripture of truth*” (v. 21; emphasis added). In chapter 12, the angel continued his explanation by revealing to Daniel that the Mede-Persian Empire would be subsequently overthrown after three more rulers had come to power (12:2). Because of our knowledge of the subsequent unfolding history, we know that his explanation included information about Alexander the Great’s rule, his death, and the division of his empire among his four generals (vv. 3, 4). Subsequently, these generals would war among themselves, and two of them would ultimately become the King of the North and the King of the South.

Continue to read this explanation through chapter 12. It encompasses a great swath of time leading to the return of Jesus Christ, the first resurrection and beyond. But...notice 12:8, 9: “...I heard, but *I did not understand*; then I said, ‘O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, ‘Go your way, Daniel:

for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (emphasis added). What? In the end, *Daniel did not understand what he wrote!!!* This certainly underscores Peter’s assessment because *we are able to understand things the prophets did not*. Why do you suppose that is true??

Peter says that God revealed to the prophets that their work was for *our* benefit, not *theirs* – and even the angels desire to look into them and understand them (1 Peter 1:12), which is an expression that denotes an *envious interest* on the part of the angels. If God had *us* in mind, why should we be so casual in our approach to His word – which is so easily accessible to all of us? I cannot promise you a personal angelic being to come and visit with you to give you understanding, but I can tell you that God will pay attention to your need for understanding if you approach Him as Daniel did (see John 14:13, 14, 26; 16:13, 14; and James 1:5-8).

Finally, Peter underscores the point that inspiration by God depends on two basic elements: (a) the inquiring mind of man and (b) the revealing Spirit of God. We should be able to understand that the Spirit of Christ has always been operative in the world. There are those who claim that the people of the Old Testament did not have the Holy Spirit. It was available to them, apparently, on a large enough scale to consider the need of future generations to know and understand God’s existence and plan. If not, how, then, did we receive such a great treasure trove of God’s revelation of Himself and His plan of salvation – the creation of man in His own image? From the foundation of this present world, this gospel has been kept intact by that guiding Spirit and the inquiring minds who have sought to know God’s *truth*. If we are not the last generation, then we must also preserve it for future generations.

Again and again, scripture makes it plain that not all will understand the message. *Many* do not understand – even though they might vociferously spout their opinions – because they look without seeing and hear without understanding (see Matthew 13:13), which is a fulfillment of prophecy against a Spiritless, superficially

religious people (see Isaiah 6:9, 10). We should now understand why prophets and holy men of old did not understand (Matthew 13:17). But...why don't the rulers and wise men of the world understand (see Luke 10:24 and 1 Corinthians 2:6)? It's really very simple: God has not chosen to reveal it to them because they have not chosen to think it important enough to *search* and *inquire* into it (see Romans 1:28 and 1 Corinthians 2:7-16). Will God condemn them to the second death because He has not chosen to reveal His truth to them? This is an important question you can use to begin a search and inquiry into God's word for the powerful answer – never mind what is popularly taught.

Make it a point to devote yourself to search and inquiry! Ask God to give you an abundance of the Spirit that reveals the spiritual intent of His word to you. Otherwise, you, too, will look without “seeing” and hear without “understanding.” Have you made understanding God’s word a *priority* in your life? If not, why not?

Diligence in Study

Spiritual growth and maturity do not fall upon us like a great bolt of holy lightning out of heaven – or by divine miracle in public or private. The road to spiritual growth and maturity is never the easy, broad boulevard – which is often infested with wolves in sheep’s clothing (see Matthew 7:13-15). The straight and narrow demands persistence and single-minded devotion – as well as steady, determined progress. It is not a road for the inattentive, superficial, or flippant...but, one for those who will earnestly and energetically take up the journey toward that road’s ultimate destination. We have a map for that road, but we must be diligent in our study of that map lest we fall by the wayside, victims of our own carelessness and inattention.

Jesus seems to have constantly wrestled with this problem among His own disciples. As He prepared Himself for His cruci-

fixion and gave His disciples some final instruction, He said: “You know the way to the place I am going.” He meant, of course, the ultimate goal set out for Him from before the creation of the orderly universe – not the road to “heaven.” Thomas, not known for being shy about his doubts, said: “We do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” (*The Jerusalem Bible*; John 14:4, 5). This was quite a perplexing problem on the eve of His arrest and subsequent crucifixion!

Which parts of His instruction over the past three-plus years had fallen on hard ground – victims to unseeing eyes and unhearing ears? The answer, of course, is revealed in Luke 24:44-49: (a) *He had not yet opened their understanding of the Scriptures about Himself*, and (b) *He had not yet given them the gift of the Holy Spirit* (see also John 14:15-26 and 16:7-15). Upon our true repentance and baptism, God’s true ministers lay hands upon us for the receipt of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 9:1-22; Romans 6; and Ephesians 1:13, 14). From that point on, God will see by our conduct if we truly hunger and thirst for spiritual growth and development (see Matthew 5:6 and 6:31-33).

In 1 Timothy 4:15, Paul admonishes Timothy to give himself fully to publicly reading scriptures (in Church services – not out on the streets), preaching, and teaching. This is an admonition for Timothy to be *diligent* – steady, earnest, and energetic. The word translated by KJV as *meditate* is the Greek term *meletao*, which means “to be diligent in,” or “to prosecute diligently,” or “to practice intensely as an athlete does.” The idea is that Timothy should sink himself into these duties so that they would fully engage his attention. It also involves *practice* – suggesting that Timothy should *discipline* himself with a planned, zealous approach to his studies. How else do you acquire the poise and confidence to carry out the Christian duties you have in service to God through Jesus Christ?

This is certainly linked to additional instruction that Paul gave Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15-19. Demonstrating your spiritual com-

petence before God is of utmost importance. How is such competence demonstrated? By learning how to correctly handle God's word of truth: God's revelation of Himself and His holiness, the stream and pattern of His prophetic thought, and the true doctrinal faith (the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God on the earth) deposited among true believers "once and for all" (Jude 3).

The Greek term for *divide* (*orthotomeo*) originally meant "to cut straight." This term was used to describe how a farmer plows his fields and how a tailor cuts fabric according to a pattern. In this context, it involves a straightforward approach to discussing God's word without beating around the bush about it or floundering around in uncertainty. Such is the meaning of the motto of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly: "Straight Talk – Plain Truth." *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich* defines it as: "...perh[aps] mean[ing] *guide the word of truth along a straight path* (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talks..." (p. 584) – like those "profane and vain babblings" Paul warns of in v. 16. Such incompetence leads one away from God's truth into a meaningless religiosity. God is not the God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

1 Peter 1:10 says that the ancient prophets "...inquired and searched *diligently...*" in order to understand the salvation God is to bring to mankind. Paul uses the same word (Greek = *ekzeteo*) in Hebrews 11:6 and 12:15. The idea is that one will crave, or highly desire, God's revelation of His truth to the point of investigating, searching out, and demanding to know – but, by inference, will do so carefully so as not to make a mistake in the conclusion(s) drawn. As this search of the scriptures is done with this kind of diligence, one's competence in rightly handling the word of truth will become more readily apparent to others – as well as one's confidence that what s/he is telling others is "straight talk and plain truth," not "fluff" and "warm and fuzzy" religiosity. "Warm and fuzzy" religiosity is designed to appeal to the emotions – often at

the expense of setting aside God's *truth*. It is nothing more than gross superficiality. ***Search and inquire about God's truth.***

Meditation

When David declared that the righteous person *meditates* on God's law day and night (Psalm 1:2), he was not suggesting that s/he would assume a particular posture and chant some kind of mantra – a mystical formula of incantation. Such a thing suggests that the Divine is encountered only by verbal charms that are spoken or sung to attract it. Many times, such a mantra requires that one has to empty his mind in order to allow the “spirit” to enter it. It is a form of magic – a thing that the God of the Bible detests (see Leviticus 19:31 and 20:6, 27 for examples). What David was suggesting was far different. I am not prepared here to give you a primer on meditation. I want to help you to focus on the bigger picture in order to whet your appetite for discovering the details about it in God's word.

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership*, says that there are three universal resolutions you must make in order to overcome powerful restraining forces that frustrate your attempts to change your core values. They are: (a) exercise self-discipline and self-denial – don't become the slave to any of your physical appetites and passions; (b) work on building character and competence – don't be deceitful about your abilities and intentions and don't try to be “all things to all people”; and (c) dedicate your talents and resources to noble purposes, and serve others unselfishly – don't simply look out for yourself (*Principle-Centered Leadership*, Simon & Schuster, 1991, pp. 48-56).

This is very much in keeping with Paul's idea as expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:27: “I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for, having been [a preacher] myself, I should not want to be disqualified” (*Jerusalem Bible*). Meditation is one means by which you

become able to discipline your thoughts – and, by extension, your actions.

The Hebrew term *hagah*, in this context, means “to be absorbed in thought” and “to soliloquize” – speaking audibly to oneself while alone. While there is oral activity, it is not by reason of chanting formulaic mantras. It is a purposeful musing or pondering or contemplation of the various aspects of God’s revelation of Himself and His standards of holiness (see Isaiah 55:8, 9). In Psalm 119, David extols the virtues of meditating upon God’s law. Why? We get a glimpse of his reasoning in verses like v. 92 (“Unless your law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my affliction.”) and vv. 97-104 (“...made me wiser than my enemies...more understanding than all my teachers...more understanding than the ancients....”). There is prayer, thanksgiving, repentance, and resolution to stay the course in God’s holiness – all part of the meditation process.

The entirety of the Psalms is, no doubt, the product of such *meditation* – but...Psalm 119 is the *meditations* of the psalmist in which he takes the Hebrew alphabet and applies to each letter a lesson from God’s law and how it acts as a governing principle in his life. It is arranged in an elaborate acrostic form: for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet there is a stanza of eight verses, which all begin with that letter. He does this with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The repetition and pattern is, perhaps, a form of *mnemonic device* to aid his learning.

What real purpose does such *meditation* serve? Simply put, it has to do with building one’s understanding of his own worth and great potential in the mind and heart of God – a worth and potential bound up in his relationships with his fellow man, the natural world around him, and his Creator and Sustainer. *Meditation* is an important key to building the mental and spiritual components of one’s *self*. How, in the broad scheme of things, can one effectively *love* his neighbor as himself if he cares little for the building of a *loving self*? How can he effectively *love* God if he cannot effec-

tively love himself enough to strive with his might to be like God in thought and deed?

This was part of an important lesson Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 15:18-20: "...Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the *heart*; and they defile the man. For out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man...." (emphasis added). Proverbs 23:7a says: "For as he *thinks* in his *heart*, so is he...." (emphasis added). It is within the *heart* of man – one's innermost being that constitutes the emotional and ethical core of his value system – that such things are set into motion. Scripture reveals here that one's actions are driven by the ethics – the moral values – of this *heart*.

Jesus declared that the *thoughts* and *intents* of the *heart* easily constitute *sin* if they are not the fruit of God's holy spirit. In Matthew 5:28, He said: "...Whosoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has *already* committed adultery with her *in his heart*" (emphasis added). He doesn't even have to actually engage in the physical action in order to be an adulterer, murderer, thief, or so on! If that is what he has his mind set on, then he *is* that. *Meditation* like David's is the remedy for such a problem. Why?

Several answers are provided: (a) the Apostle John warned: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world....For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world and its lusts pass away, but he that does the will of the Father abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17); (b) the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: "...Whatsoever things are true...honest...just...pure...lovely...of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*" (Philippians 4:8; emphasis added; see also Galatians 5:16-26); and (c) Paul also wrote to the Romans: "...Do not be conformed to this world: but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is God's good and acceptable and perfect will" (Romans 12:2; emphasis added).

Meditation helps you to set up an environment in which the *heart* can be trained to focus on the eternal values of God rather than the fleeting values of the world.

As Joshua assumed the leadership role after the death of Moses, the Lord God spoke to him about his new role. After reviewing the basics of His covenant with Abraham about the Promised Land, He told Joshua to be strong and courageous in his obedience to all of God's law. Joshua 1:8 is very important in this regard: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall *meditate* therein day and night, that you may observe *to do* according to all that is written therein: *for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success*" (emphasis added). Notice that it was not simply an exercise in committing to memory the contents of the law; he was expected to *perform* the demands of the law. Prosperity and success would follow obedience.

This is the heart and core of the importance of the *new covenant* that the Lord God will make with both houses of Israel after the return of Jesus Christ: "...I will put my laws in their *inward parts*, and write it in their *hearts*...." (Jeremiah 31:31-34; emphasis added). True Christians are presently party to that New Covenant (see Matthew 26:26-29). The understanding of the spiritual intent of God's law does not get there without some conscientious effort on your part to put it there and to reinforce its value by acting upon it in your everyday life (see Malachi 3:8-12 for an example of reinforcing by doing). That is the message in 1 Timothy 4:15: "*Meditate* upon these things; give yourself *fully* to them so that it may be apparent to others how you benefit from living by them" (author's paraphrase). ***Meditation is an important tool in your spiritual growth and development in Christ.*** Do the legwork: think through your study of God's word to get the details on how to meditate effectively on His revelation of Himself and His marvelous plan for humankind.

Memorization

How does one live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4) if he has not taken the time to commit a sizeable portion of it to memory? Does God *expect* you to *memorize* the entire Bible – book, chapter, verse? What, exactly, does the psalmist mean when he says that he has *hidden God's word in his heart*? You're going to see that it has to do with more than simply *memorizing* scriptures.

Remember that Psalm 119 is made up of 22 eight-verse stanzas. Verse 11 is part of the second stanza, which begins with the question about how a young man can cleanse his life – followed by the assertion that this will be accomplished by *guarding it according to the word of God*. In these eight verses, he confesses that he is firmly convicted that *cleansing* his life will come by laying hold of God's eternal truths, keeping them in his mind and heart, and sharing that knowledge and wisdom with others as opportunities present themselves to do so. In order to do this effectively, he must get to know God intimately, understand the condition of his own mind and heart, and be prepared to change whatever needs to be changed in order to advance to greater heights of wisdom and righteousness.

Job confessed that he had not rejected God's commandments, but had *esteemed* God's words more than "necessary food" (Job 23:12; see also Matthew 6:24-34). That, too, is this psalmist's mind-set. It is not that he would *hide* God's word so as not to reveal it to anyone. It is that he would make his heart and mind *a storehouse* into which he gathers God's thoughts and ways to preserve them for future use – especially when there might be a dearth of such knowledge abroad because of the great sinfulness of mankind (compare Amos 8:11 to Romans 1:18-32 and 2 Timothy 3).

So, the term *esteem* is also at work here. To *esteem* something means that you hold it in high regard. Jesus is very pointed in His question and answer in Matthew 12:34, 35: "...How can you, being evil, speak good things? Because out of the heart the mouth

speaks. A good man out of the *good treasure* of the heart brings forth *good things*: and, an evil man out of the *evil treasure* brings forth *evil things*" (emphasis added). Whenever you *treasure up* something, you keep it as something that is valuable and precious, not common and readily available to everyone. It is highly regarded. It is something protected and preserved.

So, in order to commit something to memory, you must regard it as highly valuable and worthy of being stored and preserved for future use as time and chance might dictate. Effective Bible study requires that you: (a) read widely, (b) carefully consider the implications and dictates of living a holy life, (c) search and inquire about God's revelation of Himself, His plans, and His way of life, (d) study diligently on a regular basis with a purposeful, systematic approach, and (e) meditate – be absorbed in thought – about what you are discovering in God's word. All of these are interlocking building blocks for effective spiritual growth and development. But, does this mean that God expects you to commit to memory entire sections of scripture – verse, chapter, book?

I was once acquainted with an elderly minister, Dr. Charles Howard, who had committed an enormous amount of the Bible to memory. He suffered from something like macular degeneration and was slowly losing his sight – and ability to read the scriptures. So, he took it upon himself to commit them to memory – book, chapter, verse. This was an astonishing and highly commendable thing for him to do. After he lost his sight, his wife continued to read to him to reinforce his memory. He accepted no crutch – and he continued his ministry until age and physical strength failed to support his efforts. He had, in effect, accomplished the intent and purpose of *hiding God's word in his heart and mind*. But God does not expect such a thing of us – at least not like Dr. Howard's accomplishment.

He does, however, expect us to commit to memory His great themes, plans, thoughts, laws, and principles of holiness – so that out of the *good treasure* in our hearts we may be able to bring forth

good things. To the degree that we are able to commit to memory book, chapter, and verse – line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:9, 10) – we will be able to bring God’s very own *specific* word to the table of conversation as an effective witness of God’s intents and purposes and will.

Do not think that it is unimportant to be able to cite *specific* scriptures. You should gradually build your knowledge of the Bible so that you know where each book is located and the great messages contained in them. Will this happen overnight? Hardly! You should be prepared to devote the rest of your life to the task and approach it as though you have a limited amount of time to do so. And...it will never get done through procrastination and allowing yourself to become overwhelmed at the enormity of the task or the cares and business of everyday life. God understands that the conversion process is not complete in one fell-swoop moment of time. It takes time for His thoughts and ways to percolate into our lives to transform us into the holy individuals He desires us to be. You can begin by getting to know, at the least, how to look them up in the Bible. Then – go from there.

Learning From God-Inspired Teachers

Paul pursues a line of reason in Romans 10:13-21 that lays out another path to effective Bible study: *Learning from God-inspired teachers*. Paul presents us here with a *paradox* – something that seems to contradict common sense, yet it is true. In Romans 9:17-23, he states that God will have mercy upon whom He will, and man has no right to question that – no more than the clay has the right to question why the potter makes a valuable vessel from a lump of clay and turns around and makes some trivial, worthless something from the same lump of clay. In essence, the power and prerogative to create and bring to pass are God’s; He is in control of everything.

Yet, in Romans 10:13-21, Paul shows that it is through man's *free will* that he is responsible to see God's revelation of Himself and to react favorably to it. God purposes, creates, and brings to pass, but He does not *force* mankind to accept it just because He has done so. It is the *paradox* of the human situation that God is in control, but the human will is free. In order for mankind to receive the salvation God has made available, he must surrender to God's requirements and call upon the name of the Lord – Jesus Christ. *Calling upon the name of the Lord* suggests repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38).

Some, according to Paul, might raise the objection that such a thing is not possible *if you do not believe in the Lord*. It is also impossible to believe in Him *if you have not heard about Him*. Moreover, it is impossible to hear about Him *if no one has come to proclaim the good news about Him*. Finally, *if God is in control*, then He must *send someone to teach others about this Christ*. How has God – who is supposed to be in control – provided *teachers and preachers* to solve this dilemma?

To this objection, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7. Isaiah shows how God's people sold themselves into physical and spiritual slavery for nothing and came to nothing as a result. In spite of this, He plans to redeem them and gather them to Himself. After having suffered so much as a result of their own poor, rebellious choices, how will God's people react to this redemption? Isaiah quotes the Lord: "...My people shall *know* my name: therefore, they shall *know* in that day that I am he who speaks: behold, it is I" (v. 6). How, exactly, will this happen? Verse 7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good news, that publishes peace; that brings good news of good [things to come], that publishes salvation; that says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Thus, Paul says that God, in fact, has provided, and will continue to provide, inspired teachers for His people. These teachers will explain to them the things of God and make them to *know* His truth. It should not go unnoticed that the people are rescued from despair

and certain destruction because, once they *know* God's truth, they willingly accept their responsibility to *know* the Lord.

In spite of the prevalence of false teachers throughout history and today (see Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, 23-28; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-12; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 4:1; and Jude 4), God has made available to mankind *inspired* teachers who have brought God's truth. Ephesians 4:11-24 explicitly reveals that God has called out and prepared individuals who can instruct others on various levels of spiritual insight into God's truth: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (see also 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29). Their insight into God's truth enables you to become firmly founded in God's thoughts and ways to the point that you are not the victim of the false teachers of this world – not "...tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive..." (v. 14). In an undertaking such as this, no man can commission himself to deliver God's message: *God gives him the message and the commission to publish it abroad to others*. You, therefore, are responsible for learning God's truth well enough to recognize those who truly represent God. And...to resist those who do not. I will continue to point out that there are *many* pretenders out there.

In Galatians 6:6, Paul broaches the topic of mutuality and reciprocity. The KJV use of the term *communicate* escapes our present-day English meaning. Not only does it convey the idea of sharing material things, it also conveys the idea of sharing spiritual things. The student takes upon himself the responsibility of contributing to the physical needs of the teacher to make possible the sharing of spiritual gifts. After all, if the teacher has to focus his attention on plying a trade, he is limited in the time he has to teach. He that is taught *in the word* should be taught the *entirety* of the principles of the doctrine of Christ: repentance from dead works, faith toward the True God, baptisms, laying on of hands for various purposes (blessing, ordinations, healing, receipt of the Holy Spirit), the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and going on to

perfection (Hebrews 6:1, 2). It is important for the true Christian community to learn to *share* with one another so that God's truth will not be hindered or limited.

In Philippians 4:9, Paul admonished Timothy to imitate those things that he learned from Paul – things that he learned, received, heard, and saw. This describes a method by which this God-inspired man taught: (a) he imparted knowledge of true Christianity by giving instruction in the principles of true faith; (b) he handed down the true traditions of how Jesus Christ lived and died – what Jude refers to as “the faith once delivered” (Jude 3); (c) he counseled Timothy and others about their conduct in God’s true Church; and (d) he presented to them a personal example of a spirit-led life in the face of personal weaknesses, temptations, and persecutions. The qualities of life referred to in v. 8 are realized only when someone *lives* by them – and...Paul insists in v. 9 that he has set the example for Timothy and others. Keeping such an example of a spirit-led life constantly before you should inspire you to pursue such a life and knowledge.

Be careful as you learn about God’s truth. There are false ministers and prophets abroad who represent themselves as being the servants of the True God. If you are not very careful, you can be deceived into believing a lie just as Eve was (see Matthew 24:24 and 2 Corinthians 11:4).

Just One Last Thought

What you have received in “Studying the Bible (1 and 2)” is a broad outline to effective Bible study. It is a *starting point* – but it will serve you well only to the degree that you put it into action. I do not pretend that it is the only approach. Certainly, if you should come across other points that lead to more effective study of God’s word, incorporate that into your approach to studying. You should make it your business to set aside the time on a regular basis to *study* God’s word. *Reading* it serves a useful purpose, I know.

However, *studying* God's word is training your mind to focus on *learning* the meaning and purpose of God's word – purposefully examining the word to commit it to *memory* and *practice*. James reminds us that we should "...be *doers* of the word, and not just *hearers*...For if any be a *hearer* of the word, and not a *doer*, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was" (1:22-24; emphasis added). ***Learn it! Do it!***

-Three-

Misinterpreting Messages

It is not unusual for messages to be misinterpreted; therefore, it also is not unusual for interpretations to be wrong, incomplete, or slanted toward a particular point-of-view. In far too many cases, a particular wrong, incomplete, or slanted point-of-view has become the accepted norm after many generations have heard it over and over again. People of succeeding generations have come to accept the *misinterpretation* as the *correct interpretation*. It is insidious, to say the least.

C. S. Lewis gave an interesting example of something similar to this that is particularly compelling in the truth that it lends to this chapter. He described how he had grown up listening to orchestral music on a gramophone. The problem with the gramophone was that the music came out as a single sound, and you could not hear the differentiation of the individual instruments. Once he grew up and finally attended a live orchestral concert, he was disappointed with it because it did not sound like the gramophone recordings. It lacked the unity, or single sound, he had grown to expect. Lewis said: "...I felt it 'wasn't the Real Thing'... [However, the] gramophone record is precisely a *substitute*, and an orchestra the *reality*. But owing to my *musical miseducation* the reality appeared to be a substitute and the substitute a reality" (*Christian Reflections*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997,

p. 39; emphases added). *Miseducation*, acquired by years of personal experience, served as a device by which Lewis was actually *deceived* about the true nature of an orchestra.

By innocently accepting misinterpretations about the message of the Bible – and being subject to *miseducation in biblical understanding* – many have grown up believing what, essentially, might be called deceptions and lies. A lie, generally speaking, is an untruth that is intended to deceive. Many deceived people who pass around the lie never intend to deceive anyone because they do not know that it is a lie. They are merely repeating a misinterpreted message that they believe is true. They are about as guilty as a person who unknowingly passes off a counterfeit dollar bill. Deceived people *do not know* that they are deceived.

How many times have you heard someone use the example of “The Little Boy Who Cried ‘Wolf!’” as an example of the effects of constantly lying to people? His lies cause the villagers to ignore him when the real wolf comes and attacks the sheep. Well, just suppose that the lying boy is only a *secondary* focus of the story. Suppose that your attention has been focused so much on the lying boy that you overlook a much greater lesson given by the story: *the people’s reaction to the lies*. What do they do in the face of the repeated lies? They refuse to respond to *any* cries for help from the boy. Which is the greater problem: (a) constantly, intentionally lying to people so that they won’t believe anything you say; or (b) allowing the repeatedly lying tongue to cause *you* to either not recognize, or to disregard, the *truth* when it finally comes to you – possibly even not caring one way or another?

Knowing what I know now, I believe the second problem is the greater of the two. Why? Because it says something about an individual’s vigilance, his willingness to be lulled into a false sense of security, his inability to recognize the cost of *not* responding, his getting so tired of being lied to that he simply quits caring one way or another. That’s a far greater price to pay than realizing that a lie

is a lie and being aggravated by having been hoodwinked by either the liar or the one who unknowingly passes it on.

Why bring this up? It has a great deal to do with how people read, interpret, and believe the message of the Bible. It has a great deal to do with belief about what the Bible actually teaches, as well as how you are to respond to the religious people who constantly cry “Wolf!” in the name of God and Jesus Christ. It has a great deal to do with being able to deal with the lies, as well as being able to recognize God’s truth so you can live by it (John 4:23, 24; 17:17). Being able to live by the truth of God presupposes the ability to recognize the truth. Recognizing the truth presupposes having the spirit of truth guiding you in what you believe and how you act because of it (read John 14:16-16:15). Remember this important biblical principle found in John 8:44: “[Satan the Devil] is a liar, and the *father* of the lie.” Whatever perverts the word of God is the result of *Satan’s* work as *the father of the lie*. You should be vigilant against the liar and the lie!

Notice very carefully 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15. The Apostle Paul is discussing someone’s belief in another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit. It is apparent that these beliefs are the work of Satan’s lies – and these lies have to do with the way Satan and his ministers *masquerade*, or *disguise*, themselves as messengers of the truth. Paul’s very clear message is that we should beware of the counterfeiters that come *in the name of Jesus Christ* (see also Matthew 24:4, 5; 7:21-23; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 3, 4). *But...*this depends heavily on your ability to *recognize* a counterfeit product when it is presented.

Let’s look at a few examples of this type of thinking and try to understand how the misinterpretation works in setting up some of the misconceptions held by many about the message of the Bible. Understanding this is important because there are *many* who come in the name of Jesus Christ and deceive *many* (Matthew 24:4, 5).

One prominent example is the question about what happens to us when we die. I’ll not reel off a catalog of the various beliefs,

but, suffice it to say, the most widely held belief is that man's life does not simply end. Man is believed to *be* – in some cases, to *have* – a “soul” or “spirit” that continues its existence beyond the termination of the body's functions. This is something that has been taught for ages – and most who claim to believe the message of the Bible believe that it is firmly founded in Biblical truth. Is that *really* the message, or is it a *misinterpretation* of the message – a *substitute*? Let's examine some ideas.

One writer says that “The *entire New Testament* distinguishes *clearly* between Hades, *the intermediate state*, and Gehenna (hell), *the place of final punishment*. Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Sheol” (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 193; emphases added). First, what is an *intermediate state*? It is something that exists or occurs between two extreme points. In this case, Hades would be a state of existence between the physical life and the place of *final punishment* or reward. Second, how is that *equivalent* to the Old Testament Sheol? Third, does the New Testament *really* address this issue?

The writer explains: “In the Old Testament, *human existence does not end with death*. Rather, man continues to exist in the nether world. *The Old Testament does not speak of man's soul or spirit descending to Sheol*; men continue to exist as ‘shades’ (*rephaim*). [At this point, you should understand that there are seven references to *hell* in the Psalms – all of them translated from the Hebrew word *Sheol*. Knowing this makes Ladd's point suspect.] The *rephaim* are ‘weak shadowy continuations of the living who have now lost their vitality and strength.’ They are ‘not extinct souls but their life has little substance.’ ...*Sheol is not so much a place as [it is] the state of the dead*. It is not non-existence, but it is not life, for life can be enjoyed only in the presence of God (Psalm 16:10, 11). Sheol is the Old Testament manner of asserting that death does not terminate human existence” (Ibid., p. 194; emphases added).

How would you interpret the message contained in that quote? Is this *really* the message of the Old and New Testaments? Or, is the writer simply inserting meaning into scripture where none of that sort exists – and was not intended to exist? Can you find anywhere in the Old Testament where the term *rephaim* is used to describe a dead person? There are a few references to *Rephaim* in Strong's Concordance – but you'll be surprised at what the term refers to. For one example, 2 Samuel 5:18, 22 refers to the *Rephaim* – a so-called *Valley of the Giants*. Goliath was a type of *Rephaim*. *Rephaim* are giants – according to the Hebrew definition. No mention of the dead existing as “shades.” Let's continue Ladd's explanation.

He then demonstrates the similarity between *Sheol* and *Hades*. He says that a *distinct* doctrine *emerged* in Judaism – a doctrine that *Sheol* is a place of blessedness for the righteous and a place of punishment for the wicked. Then he uses the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to demonstrate an idea that was widely held in Judaism about *Hades* during the time of Jesus. This is part of what he describes as a *distinct, emerging* doctrine. This suggests two things: (a) this idea did not *originally exist* in Judaism, and (b) Judaism either eventually “discovered” this “doctrine” embedded in scripture, or it was an idea *they concocted* out of their own vain imaginations or *borrowed* from others who concocted it – that is, fellow Jews or pagans. The question, then, is quite simple: *Was it revealed to them by God? Was it included in God's word of truth?* No.

One of the problems that you run into with misinterpretations, if you have not gotten the *whole picture* (Bible Study Rule #2), is the idea that the Bible contradicts itself. That problem is made more severe when you read what other people inject into the discussion – and you don't know what the *real issue* is (Bible Study Rule #1). Here is a sample of the whole picture about death as found in the Bible. Ask yourself how the above discussion about

Hades and *Sheol* could be correct if the following discussion is straight from the Bible.

Genesis 2:7 says that man was created from *the dust of the ground*. Genesis 3:19 says that man was taken *from the dust* and will be returned *to the dust* – so man is a dust-to-dust creature. Moffatt translates Genesis 6:3 like this: “So the Eternal said, ‘Human creatures are but *flesh*; my spirit is *not to be immortal in them*; they shall not live more than a hundred and twenty years’” (emphases added). This is consistent with Genesis 2:7 where it states that man became a living *soul* – that is, living, breathing *flesh*; the Hebrew word is *nephesh*. What idea do you have thus far? Do you understand that man is to be a *mortal* creature (that is, a creature capable of dying) with a life-span of no more than 120 years? Yes, you might have the very rare exception to that rule about a 120-year life-span and actually know of a person or two who lived beyond 120 years – but not likely.

In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and sacrifice his only son Isaac. If Abraham carries out this order, He will, in effect, kill the only heir through whom God said He would bless Abraham’s descendants (see especially Genesis 17:6-10, 19-21). Yet, Abraham was willing to do it! Why? Hebrews 11:17-19 says that He believed that God would raise Isaac *from the dead*.

The Greek word for *dead* used in verse 19 is *nekros* – which means *lifeless*. The *dead* go to the *realm of the dead* – that is, *Sheol* (Hebrew = O.T.) and *Hades* (Greek = N.T.). Both of these terms mean *the grave* – which is the realm of the *dead* – or, the *lifeless*. So, Abraham believed that he would be able to cut Isaac’s throat, bleed him dry, and burn him to a black crisp – then God would *restore Isaac to life!* He would have been, in effect, *lifeless* – ready to be put into the ground or grave, that is, *hell*. Depending on how long God waited before He raised Isaac, Isaac would simply decay and turn to *dust*. Would Isaac have been *aware* of anything while he was a heap of ashes on that sacrificial altar? Or,

while he was a pile of dust? How would God have restored *life* to him after all that?

Job 14 gives us a great picture of the process God uses to recover mankind from *the realm of the dead* – or this *dust-state* to which he is to return. Verses 1-9 discuss two things: (a) the mortal nature of man and (b) how God has given him a certain span of time to live in the mortal state. Verses 10-13 tell us two more important ideas: (a) man dies and wastes away – remember, Genesis 3:19 says that he returns to the dust from which he was made; so, Job says that he will not be *roused from death* until “the heavens be no more”; and, (b) when God’s wrath is past, man will be appointed a time for God to remember him in the grave. Why? Verses 14 and 15 give us the simple answer: “...All the days of my appointed time [to be in the grave – Sheol/Hell/Hades] will I wait, *til my change come*. You will call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands.” Is man a *lifeless shade* waiting – *anticipating* – God’s call to come forth?

Now, you can compare this to several New Testament scriptures to see that there is unity and consistency in God’s word – not an Old Testament idea and an entirely different New Testament idea. In his discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection from the dead, the Apostle Paul makes some interesting statements. The term *resurrection* means *to bring back from the dead* – from *lifelessness*. Verse 22 says that we all will die *in the same manner as Adam* – that is, we will return to our dust. We will be made alive *in the same manner that Jesus Christ was made alive*. How was Christ returned to life? *By resurrection from the dead.*

In his defense before King Agrippa, Paul said that Moses and the prophets declared that Jesus Christ would be the *first* that should rise from the *dead* (Acts 26:19). In 1 Corinthians 15:23, Paul says that we shall be raised from the *dead* – “every man *in his own order*.” Christ would be *first*; then, those who are His will be called forth *at the return of Christ*. These are the answers to his question in verse 35: “How are the *dead* raised – and, what kind of

body will they have?” Also, you should be aware that Paul began this discussion by talking about Jesus Christ being resurrected *from the dead*. This was in response to the claim by some who taught that there is no such thing as a resurrection *from the dead*. This could have taken two different forms: (a) there is no resurrection from the dead because when you die, that’s it – you’re dead; or (b) there is no resurrection from the dead because such a thing is *unnecessary* for an *immortal soul* – the fleshly “house” dies, but the soul is immortal and survives the death of the body.

In verses 12-18, Paul makes some interesting points. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then: (a) Christ is not risen – implying that He is still dead (v. 13); (b) both our preaching and our faith are vain and purposeless (v. 14); (c) we are liars about God’s actions by saying that He raised Christ from the *dead* (v. 15); (d) we are still in our sins – suffering their consequences (v. 17); and (e) those who have died in Christ have actually perished in the grave and have no hope (v. 18).

If you compare this lesson from Paul to some of the Old Testament scriptures that follow, you should get the idea of what God actually teaches about what man is and what happens to him when he dies. David alludes to this state when he says in Psalm 22:15, 29: “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and *you have brought me into the dust of death....All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none shall keep alive his own soul*” (Hebrew = *nephesh* – ‘living, breathing creature’; emphasis added). Here, David also shows that the *soul will die*, which is exactly what God revealed through His prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 18:4, 20: “The *soul* [*nephesh*] that sins, it shall surely *die*” (emphasis added).

David wonders aloud in Psalm 30:9 whether or not *dust* can praise God from the grave. In Psalm 44:25, the psalmist contemplates the possibility of being abandoned in the grave after death – saying: “For our *soul* [*nephesh*] is bowed down *to the dust*: our

belly cleaves unto the earth. Arise for our help, and redeem us for your mercies' sake" (emphasis added). In asking God to *redeem* them from the grave, he is asking God to deliver them from the *dust* – that is, to return them to life by a resurrection (which is what *resurrection* literally means). David praises God in Psalm 103:14-16 because He remembers that we are *dust* and as *temporary* as the grass and flowers. Another psalmist repeats the idea in Psalm 104:29 by saying: "You hide Your face, they [that is, all creatures – *nephesh*] are troubled: You take away their *breath* [Hebrew = *ruach* – breath], they die, and return to their *dust*" (emphasis added). The *Preacher* of Ecclesiastes teaches us the same idea in 3:20 and 12:7: "All [that is, all *nephesh*] go to one place; *all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again....* Then shall the *dust* return to the earth as it was [before the Lord God took it and created mankind]: and the *spirit* [Hebrew = *ruach* – breath] shall return unto God who gave it" (see Genesis 2:7; emphasis added). Isn't that very plain? But, isn't that very different from what is *commonly taught*?

Revelation 20:4-6 shows that there are at least two periods during which resurrections *from the dead* take place: the first is to *eternal life*; the second is to *mortal life* (see Ezekiel 37 for an example of one such group raised to mortal life). Those raised in the second resurrection are those who have never *really* understood God's truth because of time and chance, having been deceived, or not having it revealed to them because God chose not to do so during their lifetimes. They will be subject to the *second death* – from which there is no recovery...ever. This means that they will experience a *physical* resurrection to mortal life as a human. Verses 12 and 13 show that those in this second resurrection will be judged by the words written in "the books, according to their works." So, evidently, they will be given a span of life during which they will have "works" – opportunities to learn, practice, and accept God's truth through Jesus Christ. The objective of this

judgment period will be to determine whether or not they can be given eternal life once they *really* understand God's truth.

Imagine generations of human beings who had never even heard of Jesus Christ and the countless others who *might* have heard *about* Him, but who were *deceived* about who the *real* Jesus is (see Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15 – note v. 4 where Paul writes about *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit* – Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; Matthew 24:4, 5). God will resurrect them to live out another period of mortality during which they will be taught God's unadulterated *truth* and given an opportunity to believe it and accept it. During that period, they will be judged, according to their works, as either worthy of eternal life in Jesus Christ or worthy of the death from which there is no recovery. Isaiah 65:17-25 also describes such a period of time after the return of Jesus Christ – notice the time frame and the descriptions of life spans. These people will continue to have children and to pursue life's choices under the shelter and care of a gracious Savior King who rules over a great Kingdom on earth.

1 Corinthians 15:50-57 tells us several more things consistent with Job 14: (a) flesh and blood cannot be part of the image of God that was intended by Genesis 1:26, 27 – according to Jesus Christ, it has to undergo a *change of composition* (see John 3:3-8 and pay attention to the expression “*You must be born again*”); (b) verses 42-49 explain that the *natural body* (flesh and blood) is the *first* stage of our creation in the image of God (pay special attention to v. 46) – it is a *corruptible, earthly* body (that is, from the *dust*) – but it will become an *incorruptible, spiritual body* like Jesus Christ's; (c) and, man will receive the *spiritual body when Jesus Christ returns* – the *mortal must put on immortality*; the *corruptible must put on incorruption* (this is a signal that man does not already have immortality or incorruption in the guise of an immortal soul or a *shadow*). You can compare this to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where Paul shows Jesus Christ returning “...with a shout....” I

suspect that, with that shout, He will be calling the ones in the first round of resurrections out of the grave – *restoring them to life*. They will become *immortal* instead of *mortal* at that point.

In Ephesians 1:7, Paul calls this “*...redemption through [Christ’s] blood*” (emphasis added). In Romans 8:23, Paul says: “*...We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies*” (emphasis added). David looked forward to this when he wrote in Psalm 17:15: “As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, *when I awake, with your likeness*” (emphases added). In other words, he believed that he will awaken from the dead and have the likeness of God – what Paul in Hebrews 1:3 refers to as “*...the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.*” So what happens to the dead? Are they *conscious* or *aware* of being in an *intermediate state* between death and whatever is supposed to be their reward or punishment?

David made this request of God in Psalm 6:4, 5: “Return, O Lord, deliver my *soul* [that is: *life*]; oh save me for your mercies’ sake. *For in death there is no remembrance of you; in the grave who shall give you thanks?*” (emphasis added). Ecclesiastes 3:18-22 compares the death of a human with that of an animal. The conclusion of the matter is that man and animal share the same fate: their breath leaves them, they die, and they return to the dust again. Chapter 9:4-10 shows us that the dead know nothing and have no memory of anything. Verse 10 is very explicit: “*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave....*” Chapter 12:7 says that the *dust* will return to the earth (compare to Genesis 3:19) and the *breath* will return to God who gave it (compare to Genesis 2:7).

Are you getting the *whole picture* by now? Are you understanding what the *real issue* is? Do you have a better understanding of what God means by the term *death*? Can you understand from this where one goes when he dies? Man goes to the grave and waits for God to have a desire to complete His creation. Eph-

sians 2:10 says: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has determined ahead of time that we should perform.” If you understand all of this so far, then you are ready to learn about the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is typically used by many in Traditional Christianity in an attempt to demonstrate the awareness people have while they are in Sheol/Hades. Many use it to demonstrate that a person goes *immediately* to heaven or hell upon death. Is that true – or is it a product of *spiritual miseducation*?

Ladd says that it has often been taken as a *parable* used by Jesus to teach about the state of the dead; however, he believes this to be a *misinterpretation* of both the parable and Jesus’ intent for using it: “*This parable...does not intend to give teaching about the afterlife.* It is not really a parable about the rich man and Lazarus, but about the five brothers. Jesus used *contemporary folk-material* to set forth a single truth that if men do not hear the word of God, a miracle such as a resurrection would not convince them” (*Ibid.*, p. 194; emphasis added).

In this parable, Abraham seems to play the same part that, in some areas of Traditional Christianity, Peter is believed to play – that is, he is the “gatekeeper.” You know...St. Peter stands at the golden gates of heaven and determines who gets in and who does not. Clearly, that is not a biblical concept; it’s *folk-material*. Notice verse 24: “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus...”. Then, Abraham denies his request. The rich man persists with another request, which Abraham likewise denies. To conclude the matter, Abraham gives him a sound, fundamental reason why neither request is worthy of attention.

Why aren’t these requests made to God Himself or to His Son at His right hand? Does Abraham control things in Sheol/Hades? Is it his prerogative to send a message by disembodied spirits to warn those who are still alive in the flesh? Who is in charge of this place? Remember, the doctrine of the immortal soul assumes that

since both Lazarus and the rich man have died, their immortal souls are *alive, aware*, and *able to communicate with others* in their respective places of eternal reward or punishment. Is that what we have learned thus far? Or, is that a *misinterpretation*?

Does it make biblical sense that either Abraham or Peter is a gatekeeper to heaven? No more than it does to believe that Satan's position in the plan of God is to be the eternal agent through whom all the wicked are punished. You know how people say that, if you persist in your wickedness, the devil is going to get you – or, you are going to the devil. Such a teaching was at one time a piece of *folk-material* that gradually took on the guise of an *emerging* doctrine of Traditional Christianity – Charlie Daniels and *The Devil Went Down to Georgia* notwithstanding. Does the Bible reveal that Satan serves in such a position? No. As a matter of fact, Revelation 20:10 says that Satan will be cast into the Lake of fire to be destroyed – along with the rest of the incorrigibly wicked.

Who is the True Gatekeeper? According to John 10:1-10, it is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The trouble in much of our religious teaching is in the “fog” that is brought in with “folk-material” that is either misunderstood or misinterpreted. Understanding a few basic biblical truths helps to dispense with that “fog.”

Now, if you understand all of the scriptures about death given in the previous section, would you conclude that Jesus is giving a story that would directly *contradict* all of them? Wouldn't you say that such a thing would be highly unlikely? In John 10:35, Jesus says that “...scripture cannot be *broken*....” He means that *the word of God will not contradict itself*; neither will it support the scriptural errors of men. You won't find a New Testament scripture that contradicts an Old Testament scripture. So, what are you left with? For one thing, you should be better able to determine whether or not the Bible *clearly* distinguishes between *Hades* and *Gehenna* in the way it was discussed above – as well as whether or not the Old Testament sets forth a *distinct* doctrine of Sheol being a place of blessedness for the righteous.

Properly understood, it would appear that Lazarus would be one of those who ultimately gets resurrected to eternal life – whether it is a result of the first or second resurrection is of little consequence. He is in the “bosom of Abraham,” that is, he has received the inheritance that all of Abraham’s descendants are to receive (compare Romans 8:14-17 to Galatians 3:26-29). The rich man is one over whom the ***second death*** ultimately has power. In other words, his name was not written in the Book of Life. Revelation 20:15 says: “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” The rich man was in the process of being cast into the Lake of Fire when he made his requests. Malachi 4:1-3 agrees precisely with Matthew 7:19 and John 15:1-6: those who are accounted as unworthy to be *born again* will be burned to ashes – and they will not be remembered anymore. It will be as though they had never existed at all.

Understand this: *The Lake of Fire does not presently exist!* So, this parable is a lesson about a *future event* – not one that had taken place before the time of Jesus Christ. In fact, the characters are *imaginary representations* of those who will be ultimately “saved” and those who will not be. Neither the rich man nor Lazarus ever *really* existed. Jesus just as easily could have used a story from Uncle Remus to make the same point!

Another example is found in the interpretation many give to Jesus’ answer to the dying thief who wished to be remembered when Jesus comes into His Kingdom, or when He comes with His “kingsly power,” as many manuscripts translate the thief’s words. According to most translations, Jesus said to him: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42, 43). Ladd’s comment is forthright: “Here is a *clear affirmation* that the *soul or spirit* of the dying man would be *with Jesus in the presence of God*” (emphasis added). Is that true? Is it a *clear affirmation* of any such thing? Well, let’s work our way through the problem.

The problem is not whether the thief would *ever* be with Jesus in “Paradise” or “in the presence of God.” The problem is with the

way this statement by Jesus has been interpreted. Has it been *misrepresented* in order to fit a particular slant or point-of-view? Did Jesus really tell the thief that *on that very day* he would be with Jesus in heaven or paradise – in the presence of God? Is this, as Ladd so confidently affirms, a “clear affirmation” that the thief’s *soul* or *spirit* would be with Jesus in the presence of God (in His Kingdom or in Paradise) *that very day*?

It is generally known that the reference to “paradise” is found in three places in the New Testament: Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, and Revelation 2:7. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *paradise* refers to the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13; 31:8). It is sometimes used to describe the messianic age when the earth will be restored to Edenic conditions (Ezekiel 36:35; Isaiah 51:3). In inter-testamental writings, there was developed the idea that the blessed dead were at rest in a *garden* of God – which is what “paradise” means: a park or garden. Notice, please, that I said that the idea “was developed.” We must try to understand from what source and on what basis it was *developed*. To which of these ideas does Jesus’ statement refer?

The New International Version of the Bible has a footnote on Luke 23:43 that says that the New Testament references refer “...to a place of bliss and rest *between death and resurrection*” and cites Luke 16:22 and 2 Corinthians 12:2 as sources. The short definition of *bliss* is “complete happiness.” Are we to understand from this that both Jesus and the thief were going to be in a park or garden in a blissful state – resting somewhere between death and resurrection – *that very day*? In what Ladd earlier referred to as an “*intermediate state*”? If so, then Jesus had some problems with keeping His story straight with His various audiences!

Ladd, linking together all of his information (about Sheol, Hades, the rich man and Lazarus, and Jesus and the thief) says: “We must conclude that Jesus gives *no information* about the state of the *wicked* dead, and only affirms that the *righteous* dead are with God” (*Ibid.*, p. 195; emphasis added). If that is so, why discuss the

fate of the rich man *IF* the parable has meaning only for the *righteous dead*? Ladd also says that the parable was about the five brothers – *not about the state of the dead*. How much *righteousness* did the thief have before making his last-minute request of Jesus? Suppose your attention has been focused on the wrong interpretation of all of this. Where would you go to find the answer to the puzzle? Remember all the scriptures we have already studied about what death really is.

Based on Matthew 12:38-40, where, exactly, would you say Jesus planned to spend His time *immediately after* His crucifixion? He said He would be *in the grave (dead)* for *three days and three nights* – 72 hours! Based on Psalm 6:5, what would you say is the state of the dead? Does this describe a *blissful* state? Do Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Genesis 3:19 add any weight to the idea of the *blissful* state of the dead? Remember, *bliss* means *complete happiness*. This presupposes, on some level, *awareness* of where you are and why – awareness of either being or not being in a place of punishment. How can that be if there is “...no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, *in the grave...*”? Do you see the apparent contradiction between what is *taught* and what the Bible *actually reveals*?

What is the difference between what the Bible *actually reveals* and what many teach *regardless* of what it reveals? Are we permitted to go around putting words into God’s mouth or adding thoughts to God’s revelation? Suppose someone misinterpreted a piece of punctuation – the original Greek had no punctuation. Suppose the comma should come *after* “today” instead of *before* it.

Suppose for a moment that Jesus actually told the thief this: “I promise you *today*, you will be with me in the *grave*.” Suppose that He actually said: “I promise you *today*, you will be with me in my Kingdom.” Suppose that He actually intended for the thief to understand that he would not be overlooked when the time comes for the dead to be raised in a future resurrection. This would not contradict what Job said in Job 14 – that a man lies down and does

not rise again until the heavens be no more. In other words, the thief would wait in the grave for his turn to be resurrected, which is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 – that is, each will be resurrected in his own order.

Would the thief be an exception to the thought in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 and Hebrews 11:39, 40 that the *firstfruits* of the living and the dead would receive God's promise of life beyond the grave *together* at the return of Jesus Christ (see also Revelation 20:4-6 and note that there are at least *two* resurrections from the dead – separated by 1,000 years)? If “paradise” is an *intermediate state* in which the souls or spirits of men are mere “shadows,” what exactly would Jesus supposedly have been promising this thief (remember that man is not, nor does he have, an immortal soul)? *That* is the problem that must be correctly interpreted if we are to understand God’s truth!

So, there is the possibility that the interpreters misplaced a comma. There is no punctuation in the Greek manuscripts. Knowing what the Bible says about the state of the dead, would it be possible that Jesus’ statement should read: “I tell you *today*, you shall be with me in paradise”? In other words, Jesus would have been saying: “*Today*, I’m telling you that you will be with me in paradise.” Having been the God of the Old Testament before He became flesh, Jesus would have meant that they would be together in the grave that day. Jesus already knew that He would be there for 72 hours. According to what we have already learned, it would be quite impossible for them to have been together *that day* in the presence of God. Traditional Christianity ignores that 72-hour time span when they count from Friday at sundown to Sunday at sunrise!

In his article “The Language of the Old Testament” in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 1, 1952, p. 230), Norman H. Snaith discusses the fallacy of translating Hebrew thought with a Greek meaning. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint* – LXX) used the word *psuche* as the Greek translation of the

Hebrew word *nephesh* (Genesis 2:7 "...and man became a living *psuche*" [Hebrew = *nephesh*]). In Greek thought, *psuche* stands for a *breath-soul* and describes that part of an individual that leaves the body upon death – that is, an immortal soul. Snaith says that *it has no such meaning in Hebrew.*

Snaith concluded his remarks by saying: "...Since the word 'soul' in the English translation stands for the Hebrew *nephesh*, *there is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word 'soul' should be thought of as that which survives death.* When the Bible writer says...that 'God breathed into [man's] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,' ...he does not mean that God thereby gave to man an immortal soul. He means [by the term *nephesh*] that God...breathed into him his own life-giving breath, so that this shape of dust became alive....*If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the human soul is held to be a Christian doctrine, then it should be realized that it is not a biblical doctrine.* The *biblical doctrine* is of a resurrection life for those who 'have the spirit' and are 'in Christ'..." (see Romans 8:9-17; emphases added).

John Short, in his expository comments in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 10, 1952, p. 253) about 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, wrote: "The Christian doctrine *is not one of immortality but of resurrection.* We shall do well to get this point clear. As expounded by the Apostle Paul...man's hope of survival depends *not on the inherent immortality of his soul*, but on the act of God. His immortality is involved in his resurrection [that is, it is through the resurrection that man achieves immortality], not his resurrection in his immortality [that is, the body is not raised from the grave in order to reunite it with his immortal soul]. *There is nothing in Paul's writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is inherently [that is, in its very nature] immortal*" (emphases added). You can see in Ezekiel 18:4, 20 that *souls* – that is, *nephesh*...the same word used in Genesis 2:7 – are *perishable, corruptible, mortal, capable of becoming lifeless.*

So...would you assume that Jesus Christ *really* promised the thief that they would be together in God's presence *that very day*? Or, would you conclude that the Bible *must* speak a unified, consistent message without contradiction if it is to be God's word of *truth*?

Finally, it is not just a problem in sorting out the state of the dead. It is a problem of correctly interpreting all of the word of God. Any message that goes out as an interpretation of the word of God must be delivered correctly in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). After all, if the Bible is God's inspired word (see 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16, 17), then it *must be* unified and consistent in its presentation of God's truth. And, *you* must not allow yourself to fall for man's *misinterpretations!*

Jesus warned about this kind of problem. His comments in Matthew 24 are filled with warnings about those who will come in His name to deliver messages – note especially verses 23-28. This is the warning of Jesus Christ that someone will either *intentionally* skew the information to fit a particular slant, or that someone will pass on faulty information they have received and believed to be the truth. In either case, the net result of such spurious messages is that people are led astray and suffer severe spiritual damage as a result. Even the *very elect* are at risk!

And, the damage is not just limited to what can be suffered in the physical body. The damage is something that can affect one's eternal disposition; it can determine whether or not one is reduced to ashes and forever forgotten, or whether or not s/he gets to share in the eternal life that is going to be made available to the faithful and true. What if that *oil* in Matthew 25:1-13 represents the *spirit of truth*? Would you have enough to keep *your* lamp burning, or would *you* be left in the dark?

Work diligently to correctly interpret God's word (2 Timothy 2:15). Rightly divide the word of truth! Beware of those who *misinterpret* God's word! It is much more commonplace than you have ever imagined!

-Four-

Recognizing Those Who Speak on God's Behalf

(Deuteronomy 18:21)

There are many who come “in the name of the Lord,” yet Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only he who does the will of my Father* who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21; emphasis added). In spite of their many claims to validate their right to enjoy the fruits of the kingdom of heaven (v. 22), He will deny having had any relationship with them and will cast them out as evil-doers (v. 23). In Matthew 24:4, 5, Jesus warned True Christians to beware of the deception of those *who will come in His name...but who do not represent Him.*

When true worshipers face such situations, it would only be right to ask how one can *know* when God involves Himself with those who claim to come in the name of Christ and who claim that their teachings *are* the will of the Father. Surely God does not allow those who strive to worship Him in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23, 24) to walk about in a fog of spiritual ignorance – not being able to discern the lies and subtle deceptions the deceivers use. If we are to “...try every spirit...” (1 John 4:1), then surely God’s word reveals how we can recognize a messenger who has not spoken on the Lord’s behalf.

Deuteronomy 18:21 raises the question about being able to tell the difference between those who speak on God's behalf and those who do not. While it comes at the end of a discussion about avoiding the abominations of the heathen, it, nevertheless, provides us with *vital principles* from which we can infer larger principles for our current understanding and practices.

The instruction begins with verse 9: “When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, *you shall not learn to practice the abominable practices of those heathen nations.*” This is echoed later by Jeremiah *after* the Israelites had been in the land for centuries and had, indeed, learned their ways, practiced them, and suffered greatly at the hand of God for doing so (see Jeremiah 10). It is undeniably apparent that God has an unyielding attitude about the religious practices of heathen nations – as well as a plain, easily discernable concept about how He wants to be worshiped.

It is expressed in the New Testament in John 4:23, 24 with language like this: “...*True worshipers* shall worship the Father *in spirit and in truth*: because the Father seeks this type of worshiper. God is a spirit: *and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” (emphases added). This is an echo of the Old Testament in Isaiah 8:20, where the Lord God gives us a definite guiding light: “To the *law* and to the *testimony*: *If they do not speak in concert with these, it is because there is no light in them*” (emphases added).

Notice the catalog of heathen methodology described in Deuteronomy 18 that is so abhorrent to God: (a) passing through fire, (b) divination, (c) all types of fortune telling, (d) enchantment, (e) witchcraft, (f) charming, (g) consulting familiar spirits – or, channeling/mediums, (h) wizardry, and (i) necromancy. All of these words refer to various types of divination, the production of curses, spiritualism, and conjuring up the dead in one manner or another.

If you put them into similar groups, it would look like this: (a) ***passing through fire*** – which includes purification rites like walk-

ing on fiery coals or jumping through bonfires, as well as child sacrifices; (b) ***divination/ fortune telling/enchantment*** are different ways by which individuals seek to foresee or foretell future events or to discover hidden knowledge – usually by the study of omens like reading bones, animal entrails, cards (ex. = Tarot), dice, or tea leaves, or by the aid of supernatural powers; (c) ***witchcraft/charming*** refer to those who conjure up magical spells of various sorts for “good” or “evil.” God, however, does not distinguish between a “good” and “bad” witch in this ban: both are abominations; (d) ***channeling/wizardry/necromancy*** refer to those who by various means attempt to consult the world of the spirits – like the *seance*, during which they believe that they are actually speaking to a *dead person* (by now you should know the futility of such attempts), or the *ouija board*, by which messages are spelled out, supposedly, by some guiding spirit.

From this, you should understand that God is specifically detailing religious practices that are not acceptable to Him. In all cases mentioned here, the people are not resorting to God; they are resorting to all manner of supernatural means other than God – that is, to the spirit world, which is nothing more than *demonic powers* of various sorts – to guide their lives, to get their way, or to reveal the “divine will.” Verse 14 very succinctly says that *God has not allowed His people to do these things.*

The Duty of a True Prophet

In verses 15-18, Moses tells the people that God will raise up a Prophet like himself from among them to reveal to them God’s will. The reason for this is simple: they did not want to hear the voice of God at Mt. Horeb/Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:18, 19). They said that they would listen to Moses, but they were afraid of listening to God’s voice lest they die. God agreed to speak to them through Moses.

Now that it was time for them to go into the promised land – and time for Moses to die – God was revealing to them that He would continue the line of prophets who would reveal to them God’s will. Amos reiterated this idea several hundred years later when he was pronouncing God’s divine judgment upon the ten tribes of the House of Israel (to understand the difference between the *House of Israel* and the *House of Judah*, see 2 Samuel 5:1-5; 1 Kings 11:1-13, 26-40; 12; and Ezekiel 37 – both *Houses* make up the *nation* of Israel). To those Israelites, Amos said: “Surely the Lord God will do *nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets*” (Amos 3:7; emphases added).

The “reality” behind this promise of a prophet like Moses is, of course, Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul reminds the Hebrews of this when he says: “God, who at different times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days *spoken to us by His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom He also made the worlds...” (Hebrews 1:1, 2; emphases added). It should be apparent, then, that God’s Law (spoken to Moses) and His Prophets (God’s revealed plans for the future) contain God’s will. All of this was written down for future generations to have as a *testimony* of God’s revelation of Himself to them and of His work among them. Pay very close attention to that statement for future reference.

In Deuteronomy 18:19, God warns the people about not listening to His prophet. Presumably, this carries with it the meaning that the person must not only *hear/listen to* the contents of the prophecies, but he must also *carry out* any instructions contained therein. James says that we must be *doers* of the word and not just *hearers* (James 1:22-25). It makes little sense for God to require certain action and then have people sit idly by and proclaim “faith” in the word of God. Even before the literal establishment of His Kingdom, God expects His will to be “*...done in earth, as it is in heaven*” (Matthew 6:10). In like manner in verse 20, God warns the prophet to speak only what God has revealed to him. He may

not speak in the name of other gods. If he does, he will die – one assumes ultimate destruction in the lake of fire in this case.

It is especially important to note the attitude of Jesus Christ during His ministry: (a) it is His desire to carry out the will of the Father and to finish the Father's work (John 4:34); (b) He does not seek to do His own will, but to do the will of the Father (John 5:17-31; 6:38-40; Hebrews 10:7); and, (c) the doctrine that He teaches is given to Him by the Father (John 7:16-18, 28, 29; 14:10, 24; 17:6-8, 14, 17) – notice especially John 12:49: “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, *He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak*” and 14:24: “*The word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me*” (emphases added). All of this is in keeping with the duties of a prophet to speak only what God has revealed to him. Since Jesus fulfills the role of that ultimate Prophet God has sent to us, then He will deliver to us *the Father's will – the Father's divine message*. Jesus never resorts to the foolishness of heathen practices – and He clearly reveals to His people what is the will of the Father.

So, the implicit message of Deuteronomy 18:21 is quite simple: God's message – and, of necessity, God's messengers – will not be a mixed bag of scripture and paganism. *Any who bring such a mixed bag to the religious table can be safely regarded as not representing the True God*. Their messages, therefore, will not have come from God – even if they use biblical references and attempt to validate their messages with the name of Christ. That, my friends, will narrow the playing field considerably! Look about you and find those who practice a *syncretic Christianity* – one mixed and mingled, by sham compromises, with contradictory pagan beliefs into the doctrines of true faith – and you will be identifying those who are *not* acceptable to Christ. When you do, know that they do not represent the true and living God.

If God has a True Church – and He *does* because Jesus tells us in Matthew 16:18: “...*I will build my church*; and the grave shall not prevail against it [that is, death will not cause it to cease to

exist]” (emphases added) – then it must be an active force for God’s *truth* in the world today. *It will avoid being syncretic.* God warned against this in Deuteronomy 12:30-32: “Take heed that you do not get snared by adopting the practices of the heathens...by inquiring after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I will do the same thing’ [that is, ‘I will serve the Lord my God in the same or a similar way’]. You shall not do this unto the Lord your God because they have done unto their gods everything that the Lord hates – even burning their sons and daughters in sacrificial fires to their gods. *Whatever I command you to do, make sure you do it without adding to it or diminishing from it*” (emphases added). Those who have added to or taken from God’s word should be easy to spot – if you have ears to hear and eyes to see.

So, you must look carefully at what is offered in the name of the True God and ask “Is this mixed and mingled with paganism?” If it is, then you do not want to be part of it. Avoid it. Shun it. An example of something added to God’s word would be **Easter** (eggs, rabbits, chicks, etc.). Another would be **Christmas** (tree, wreath, Santa, yule log, etc.). A third would be **Hallowe'en** (ghouls, ghosts, witches, etc.). A fourth would be **Valentine's Day** (Dan Cupid and his hearts and candies...enough said). This, too, narrows the field considerably. And...you could take an encyclopedia and look up several other items, such as the immortal soul, the Trinity, Sunday versus the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of worship. You might be surprised at what you find! Those who teach that God’s Law has been done away with are an example of those who have also diminished or taken away from God’s word.

Please do not make the mistake of thinking that worrying about such things is trivial and beneath the notice of God. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ nailed all of that to the cross – as some claim is the correct interpretation of Colossians 2:14. If that is true, then it directly contradicts what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-19: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets: I have not come to abolish, but to

fulfill" (emphases added). And remember that He came to do the Father's will and to speak what the Father directed Him to speak. Jesus Christ did not *diminish* or *add to* God's word. Isaiah 42:21 says that "...He will *magnify* the law, and make it honorable." The remainder of Matthew 5 through Matthew 7 is just such a magnification: "You have heard...but I say...." Not abolishing the Law and the Prophets is the Father's will and message! Giving *fuller meaning* to the spiritual intent of the Law is God's will and message! ***Any who speak differently do not represent the True and Living God!***

In Romans 13:10, Paul says that "...*love* is the fulfilling of the Law." In chapter 3:20, he says that the Law explains to us what sin is. And, in verse 31 he asks and answers an important question: "Do we then *make the Law void through faith? God forbid:* in fact, we establish the Law..." [that is, we make or consider it to be *valid*] (emphases added). The Apostle John wrote: "Whoever commits sin transgresses the Law because *sin is the transgression of the Law*" (1 John 3:4; emphases added). That means that those who do not consider the Law to be valid are sinners/transgressors. Paul wrote in Romans 6:23 that "...the wages of sin is death...." It would make sense, then, that the "...handwriting of ordinances that was against us..." in Colossians 2:14 would be a *death warrant*. But...upon our repentance (vv. 10-13), that death warrant – not the Law – is nailed to the cross instead of being served against us. ***Any who advocate otherwise do not represent the True and Living God!***

This brings us full circle back to Isaiah 8 where the Lord God commands: "*Bind up the testimony and seal the Law among my disciples....*To the Law and to the testimony: ***if they do not speak in concert with these,*** it is because there is no light [that is, there is no truth and proper understanding] in them" (vv. 16, 20; emphases added). The idea of "binding up the testimony" and "sealing the law" has to do with allowing His true disciples to understand it –

not the doubtful and the gainsayers – and verifying it by its fulfillment in the future as He said it would happen.

Isaiah was led by the Holy Spirit to record these words against the King of Judah and the House of Judah. Why? Because Isaiah had spoken on God’s behalf, and they had fully rejected it. So, God told him to file it away in a written record and let God’s word be vindicated, by *fulfillment* in history, as a witness of His truth and integrity. This is God’s challenge in Isaiah 44:7, 8 and 45:19-21: He has not acted in secret, but He has spoken openly and boasts of the power to bring His word to *fulfillment* across the vast ages. *That* will be His proof! And...you need to know that it was He Who spoke it. In keeping with this idea, then, Jesus Christ announced at the beginning of His ministry that He had not come to do away with the Law and the Prophets – that He had come to cause the “secrets” that had been spoken in them to the fathers by the prophets to come to pass – that is, to be fulfilled.

But, many of the prophetic pronouncements have even yet to be fulfilled because they are a “work in progress” throughout the coming ages. Paul shows the sense of this when he writes: “[Christ] must reign *until* He has conquered all of His enemies. The last enemy to be destroyed is death [you have to do away with sin in order to do away with *death*; read 1 John 3:4 with this in mind]...And when He shall have subdued all things, then He shall subject Himself to Him Who put all things under [the power of Christ]....” (1 Corinthians 15:25-28; emphases added). Plainly, these aspects of God’s will *have not been fulfilled* yet. Christ has not yet returned, and sin still rages on.

Therefore, the abominations of paganism, in whatever seemingly harmless form you find them, are not beneath the dignity of God to notice. He does notice them – and He holds us all responsible to stay away from them. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Paul asks a series of questions about the relationship of God’s truth to paganism that should be adequate instruction to any so-called “New Testament” Christian. His summation is simple: “Therefore, *come out*

from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean thing – and I will receive you” (emphasis added). Now, put that into perspective by answering this question: What will He do if you *do not* come out from among them? He will count you as a lawbreaker and punish you for your rebellion.

Worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him *must* worship Him in *spirit* and in *truth*” (John 4:24; emphasis added), He was revealing to her the spiritual basis for *true worship*. Properly understood, worship of the True God has its basis in two primary factors: *spirit* and *truth*. So, in order for the Israelites to have that kind of worship, their worship of God had to be based on: (a) actual historical experiences [which contain knowledge of God’s truth found in the *Law* and *Testimony*], and (b) actual spiritual communion with God. So, the basis for our obedience toward the standards of holy behavior required by God – that is, the Law – is derived from the historical experiences of God’s people and their spiritual communion with Him: spirit and truth.

The historical experiences are the *testimony* – the evidence, the personal witness accounts, the proof – that God has personally involved Himself with His people by revealing to them His existence and His thoughts and ways (compare Isaiah 55:8, 9 with 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 and Romans 1:18-32; 8:14-16). The crux of 1 Corinthians 2:9-16 is the *manner* by which God reveals Himself: it is an intimate, spiritual relationship in which God shares His thoughts and ways with the recipient. This is inextricably tied to the historical experiences – whether they are the experiences of others or personal experiences.

Jesus explained this to His disciples like this: “He that comes from above is above all others; he who is born of the earth is earthly and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven *bears*

witness to the things He has seen and heard, even if His testimony is not accepted; though all who do accept His testimony are attesting the truthfulness of God, since He whom God has sent speaks God's own words: God gives Him the spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to Him. Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: the anger of God stays on him" (John 3:31-36; emphasis added). Jesus could base His testimony on: (a) having been with the Father throughout the eternity past (see John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:9-18) and (b) having been the Lord God of the Old Testament who was intimately involved with all of the covenants and promises, as well as the laws, statutes, ordinances, precepts, and judgments (see Genesis 26:1-5).

Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus Christ was the Rock that went with the Israelites and led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). As the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt, the Lord God explained its significance to Moses...as well as its importance as a historical experience: "And this day [Passover] shall be unto you for a *memorial*: and you shall keep it a feast unto the Lord throughout your generations [that is, in the historical years ahead]; you shall keep it as a feast *by an ordinance* [as a law] for ever" (Exodus 12:14; emphasis added). It is placed in a historical context in verses 26 and 27: "And it shall come to pass [in future history], when your children shall say unto you, 'What do you mean by this observation?', that you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.'" Why do such a thing? *Because it is the testimony of God's great deliverance of Israel from Egypt, from slavery or bondage, from "sin."*

In Deuteronomy 15, where the Lord God explains the importance of the seventh year (the year of release of the poor and slaves), He explains the importance of the historical experience:

“You shall remember that you were a *slave* in the land of Egypt, and the Lord redeemed you: *therefore I require this of you this day*” (vv. 1-18; emphases added). Historical experience is a *testimony* of God’s work – and a *testimony* of how He thinks. It has the weight of a legal witness in a trial – the weight of the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16) behind it.

If it is a *testimony* of that experience, then it has the added *spiritual significance* of being a *promise* of God’s *present* and *future* deliverance of His people from the slavery of sin. Egypt is a *type* of sin – a model or example or symbol. Jude exhorts us to “...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” so he adds this important note about a historical experience: “I will, therefore, remind you – even though you once knew this – how the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward *destroyed them that did not believe*” (v. 5; emphasis added). The evidence of their unbelief lay in the fact that they griped, murmured, rebelled, and longed to return to *Egypt* to become slaves again, rather than willingly leaving it behind and enduring the temporary hardships involved in going to the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Notice Leviticus 23:5, 6. These are descriptions of two of the holy days to be observed by God’s people. Paul relates both of them to spiritual concepts that Christians should practice by reminding them that a little leavening leavens the whole lump. Therefore, we are to purge out the old leaven so that we may be a “new lump.” Why? *Because we are meant to be unleavened.* Since Christ, *our Passover*, has been sacrificed, we are to celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread by ridding our lives of the old leavening of evil and wickedness, leaving only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth to influence our behavior (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

You can see in Exodus 13:3-10 that they are to be reminded – by eating unleavened bread during this festival season – of having been delivered by God from Egyptian bondage. Why? Because

the observance is to serve as a *sign* on the right hand, or as a *memento* on the forehead, so that the Lord's law may be in our mouths to witness to the fact that the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt with a strong hand. Remember: God's Law defines *sin* for us (Romans 7:7), and He delivers us from *sin* through Jesus Christ. That is God's testimony – His witness!

Paul also uses this experience to testify that following Christ into righteousness is regarded more highly than the Exodus experience under the leadership of Moses. In Hebrews 3:5, he writes: “And Moses was truly faithful as a servant in the house of God – a testimony [witness] to the things that would be *revealed later*” (emphasis added). What things would be revealed later? Paul says that it is revealed by the Holy Spirit (the means by which God reveals to us His truth): “The Holy Spirit says: ‘If only you would listen to Him today; do not harden your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, the Day of Temptation in the wilderness, when your ancestors challenged me and tested me, even though they had seen [witness-ed] for forty years what I could do. That was why I was angry with that generation and said: *How unreliable are these people who refuse to grasp my ways!* And so, in anger, I swore that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them’” (vv. 7-11; emphasis added). Then Paul warns his readers not to do the same thing lest they suffer a similar fate (vv. 12-19).

He adds these thoughts well worth spiritual consideration: (a) “...We shall remain co-heirs with Christ *only if* we keep a grasp on our first confidence to the very end” (v. 14; emphasis added), and (b) “...It was because they were unfaithful that they were not able to enter God's rest [that is, the Promised Land]” (v. 19). He uses this historical testimony to remind Christians in Hebrews 4 that God still has a “rest” for them to enter; therefore, the spiritual lesson is that they should not conduct themselves as the ancient Israelites did. This is the nature of the *testimony*. In 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11, Paul says that the things that were written down about the Israelites and the Exodus were written for us as *figures* or *types*.

(Greek = *tupos*). As strange as this might seem, the specific meaning has to do with *a symbol/foreshadowing of the tribulation to come* (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich – *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

We have our own Exodus to make from “Egypt” – and we need to be familiar with the historical account of Israel’s example so that we do not make the same mistakes they made. This is made explicit in Paul’s warning (vv. 6-28) as he begins by saying that these things were *our figures* (*tupos* – “shadows”) to the intent that *we should not lust after evil things after which they lusted*. These things happened to them for *our types* (*tupos* – “shadows”): and were written for *our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come* (vv. 6, 11). It is a *testimony* or a *witness* to us of how God thinks and acts – His behavioral requirements for our deliverance and the certainty of His judgment against trespassers.

So, the *testimony* of God is the recorded history of God’s relationships with various individuals in the Old and New Testaments as He revealed Himself – His thoughts and ways – to them. It involves many aspects of those relationships – including laws, covenants, promises, punishments – and interventions on their behalf. The *testimony* of God serves both as a witness and a warning to this and future generations of people who claim to worship and serve the True and Living God.

Just before Israel crossed the Jordan River into the promised land, Moses had a final message for them about the *laws*, *testimonies*, and *statutes* God had revealed to him on Mt. Sinai/Horeb (Deuteronomy 1:1; 4:44-46). In chapter 5:1, Moses charged them in this manner: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments that I am speaking in your ears this day, that you may learn them and take care to observe them.” What was his purpose in doing this *review* (*Deuteronomy* means the second giving of the Law – *deutero* = *second* and *nomy* = *law*)?

I want to write this out completely for you because it is so powerful in its literal and spiritual meaning: “...All of you who

stayed faithful to the Lord your God are still alive today. See, as the Lord my God has commanded me, I teach you the laws and customs that you are to observe in the land you are to enter and make your own. Keep them, observe them, and *they will demonstrate to the nations your wisdom and understanding*. When *they* come to know all these laws, *they* will exclaim, ‘*No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation.*’ And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to Him? *And what great nation is there that has laws and customs to match this whole Law that I put before you today?* But take care what you do and be on your guard. ***Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life; rather, tell them to your children and to your children’s children***” (emphases added). So, Moses marks out a pathway for worshiping God in spirit and in truth: (a) learn God’s laws and observe them; (b) be faithful to God in all you do; (c) be a faithful example to those not in the faith; and (d) teach them to your children and grandchildren so that future generations will also know them and live by them. Worshiping God in spirit and in truth is an awesome responsibility that we dare not ignore.

Accepting God’s *Charge*

Now consider this: Moses was instructed by the Lord God to preserve reminders – *testimonies* – of His presence among the Israelites and to put them into a secure place to preserve them in perpetuity for future generations. In Psalm 119:14, the psalmist recalls these “testimonies” when he says: “I have rejoiced in the way of your *testimonies*, as much as in all riches.” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* notes that this is a reference to the “...testimony of the Ten Words on the tables as a solemn divine charge,” as well as to the “...ark as containing tables...” and to the

“...tabernacle as containing [the] ark of testimony...” (p. 730, word reference #5715; emphases added). What does this mean?

The “*Ten Words on the tables*” are, of course, the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. The “*ark as containing tables*” is the Ark of the Covenant into which the tables of stone were put. And...the “*tabernacle as containing [the] ark of testimony*” is the Tabernacle into which the ark was placed – in the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. The Apostle Paul describes this in Hebrews 9:1-7, but in verse 4 he says that the Ark of the Covenant was overlaid completely with gold, and it contained the **golden pot containing manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets containing the covenant.** What is the significance of these items as *reminders or testimonies*?

A *divine charge* is the imposition of a particular duty or task – entrusting someone with the responsibility of taking over the care or management of something. We can understand this in New Testament terms in Paul’s statement in Romans 3:1, 2 where he asks what advantage the Jews have and what profit there is in circumcision, which was a token of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham, a covenant based on faith in God’s promises (see Genesis 17:10-14 and Romans 4:9-16). To this, Paul exclaims that they have great advantage *mainly because the oracles of God were committed to them.* The Greek word from which we get the English translation *oracles* is *logion.* Properly understood, it means that God’s sayings, His laws, His revelations, and His promises were committed to Abraham and subsequently passed on to his ancestors – ultimately becoming the responsibility of the Jews to maintain and propagate.

You can get the sense of this when you read Genesis 26:1-5. Here God is conferring upon Isaac, Abraham’s legitimate heir, the covenant He made with Abraham. Notice verse 5, where He tells Isaac that He was doing this *because Abraham obeyed His voice and kept His charge, commandments, statutes, and laws.* This

very forcefully demonstrates that God's commandments, statutes, and laws were in effect before He concluded His covenant relationship with Israel at Sinai several hundred years later – a type of covenant separate from the covenant He concluded with Abraham because Sinai was, metaphorically speaking, a *marriage covenant* (study Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:20; 31:32; Ezekiel 16). God's relationship with Israel came by mutual agreement (see Exodus 19:5-8) and established them as His "peculiar treasure above all people." In this relationship, there was a special kind of social and legal dependence established by which a "family" was to be founded and maintained. This was intended to be a close, permanent relationship – as described by Jesus in Matthew 19:5, 6. Relationships established with other gods constituted "adultery," and such transgressions could be settled by divorce. This "marriage covenant" – and the subsequent divorce of both Houses of Israel – did not rescind the Abrahamic covenant (Galatians 3:18-21).

You can see the same kind of *charge* in Genesis 35:9-15 where the covenant is passed from Isaac to Jacob (Abraham's grandson), whose name was later changed to Israel (see Genesis 32:24-32; 35:9-15). It ultimately became the responsibility of the Jews – descendants of Israel's son Judah (see Genesis 29:35) – because the remainder of the nation of Israel had been carried away into captivity by the Assyrians between 721 to 718 B.C. – never to be returned to the land again (see 2 Kings 17). Only Judah, Benjamin, and Levi survived as a national entity – and they, collectively, became known as the *Jews* (see Romans 10:1 where Paul acknowledges that he is a Benjamite).

This is important to modern-day, True Christians because the House of Judah did not keep the "marriage" covenant any better than the House of Israel kept it (see Ezekiel 16 – especially verses 44-63). As a result, they also did not keep the covenant of faith between God and Abraham! God cast them off – that is, He *divorced* Himself from them because of their great sins. Those who remained faithful were the ones who took over the care and manage-

ment of the Abrahamic covenant – the ones who *kept God's charge*. This is understanding that is completely absent from those who teach that God's laws and prophets are done away with in Christ.

Paul goes through a line of reasoning in Romans 9-11 that is very important for understanding this. Essentially, what it shows is the exercise of God's *grace* in a manner that most in Traditional Christianity do not understand. It is grace by *election*: God chose people who did not earn what they were getting and could never pay it back. Such was God's choice of Abraham. He chose Isaac to inherit the promises and covenant from Abraham, rather than Ishmael or the six sons Abraham had by his second wife Keturah. Then, He chose for the promises and covenant to pass to Jacob (Israel), rather than to Esau, while they were still in the womb. You can see in Genesis 48:8-20 that He chose to pass the birthright portion of the covenant to Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh – in effect, Israel adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as his very own sons (see verse 5, 6). The promise of a kingly line of rulership (see Genesis 17:4-8; 15, 16) was granted to Judah (Genesis 49:8-12). In effect, this entire Abrahamic covenant was in Israel's possession well before they were taken out of Egypt and “married” to the Lord God at Sinai.

In chapter 11, Paul demonstrates how the Gentiles have been grafted into the “holy stock/root” to also become recipients of the promises and covenant that God made with Abraham. Paul expresses the same idea in Galatians 3:6-8; 26-29. Being “in Christ” entitles the true believer a share in the inheritance (see Romans 8:14-18 and Galatians 3:16-19). He also points out that Israel will be grafted back in when “...the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25). Verse 26 points out that *all Israel* will ultimately be grafted back in when Christ returns to rid her of her sins (see also Jeremiah 31:31-33, Hebrews 8:7-13, and Hebrews 10:16, 17 for the basis of this new covenant with Israel). Why? Because God does not change His mind about His gifts and calling (v. 29). Even

today, that Abrahamic covenant is maintained and preserved by God's true people.

Who, with the failure of the House of Judah to keep God's covenant with Abraham – as well as the “marriage” covenant with all of Israel – became responsible for keeping God's ***divine charge***? Quite logically, that responsibility would have fallen to the Church that Jesus Christ is building (Matthew 16:18)! It is implicit in the Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and teach all nations [taking the gospel to the Gentiles, too], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (emphases added). This is the **divine charge** that includes God's commandments, statutes, and laws.

To whom do you listen if you have: (a) a voice that advocates the termination or abolition of God's law and requires no responsibility on the believer's part to regard it as worthy of being kept... and (b) an opposing voice that advocates the maintenance of God's holy standards as found in the commandments, statutes, and judgments? God bound up the importance and meaning of His Law and Testimony to be hidden from even the learned because the majority were making a mockery of them (see Isaiah 8:16).

The true meanings of the Law and the Testimony will be revealed and read with understanding by Christ's true disciples. This is no different from what Daniel was to experience regarding the meaning of the things that God revealed through him: “...The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:9). What will happen then? Their meanings will be opened up to God's True Disciples to be made known to the world as the “true gospel.”

This presupposes that God will call out true disciples, throughout the intervening history up to the time of the return of Jesus Christ, through whom He will make the meanings of these things apparent. It also presupposes that only the ***few*** will actually under-

stand God's truth until the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth (see Matthew 7:13, 14; 20:16; Luke 13:23-30; Romans 9:22-28; 11). After the kingdom of God has been established on the earth, its larger fulfillment will occur (for example, see Isaiah 2:1-5, Ezekiel 37, Jeremiah 31:31-33, and 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). Compare this to what is commonly taught....

The Significance of the Contents of the Ark of the Covenant

Believe it or not, the contents of the Ark of the Testimony reveal much about what will be the character of those who speak for God. In Exodus 25:10-22, we find revealed to us the details of its construction. It was about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. It was overlaid with gold inside and out – a symbol of wealth and godly character that has been put to the test and purified by it (see Revelation 3:18). Two gold-cast rings were attached front and rear on both sides, and two staves of shittim wood were overlaid with gold and used to carry the ark. On top was placed the mercy seat: 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. Two cherubim were constructed of solid gold – one at each end of the mercy seat facing one another toward the mercy seat with their wings outstretched to cover it. They would be, in effect, *covering cherubim*. God, upon His throne, would be the central focus of worship. It would be from above this mercy seat between the covering cherubim that the Lord God would communicate with Moses and Aaron. Notice how this is spoken of in verse 22: "...There I will meet with you, and I will commune with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give you in commandment unto the children of Israel." The high priest was allowed to come into this room of the *holy of holies* only once a year (Leviticus 16:2; Hebrews 9:7). In verse 16, the Lord God said: "...You shall put

into the ark ***the testimony which [that] I shall give you.***" Of what does that ***testimony*** consist?

Some would readily assume that the ark of the testimony itself does not presently exist – believing that it was burnt up when the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple in 587 B.C. The vessels of gold and silver taken from the Temple by the Babylonians were returned to the Jews who were released by the Persian king Cyrus (Ezra 5:13-15; 6:5), as well as by Artaxerxes (7:19). While there is no specific mention of the ark of the testimony, one might wonder how the cultic practices of the temple could be completely carried out without the ark of the testimony sitting in the holy of holies. It was, after all, the central focus of the observance of the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:12-17). Perhaps it disappeared after the destruction of the temple by Titus and his Roman armies around A.D. 70. The point is simple: its existence is presently unknown – a matter of little consequence today because, as Paul says, it was merely a *copy* of the real ark of the testimony of God in heaven (see Hebrews 8:5; 9:8, 9, 23-24; 10:1).

Paul's description of its contents is in Hebrews 9:4: "...The ark of the covenant [testimony] [was] overlaid completely with gold [and contained] *the golden pot filled with manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant*" (emphasis added). In Revelation 11:19, John writes: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament [testimony]...." So, we know that the real ark of the testimony of God is in heaven – and, presumably, it contains the same three items listed by Paul. What is the significance of each of these items, and how does that relate to the character of the person who truly represents God when he speaks on God's behalf?

Manna is first discussed in Exodus 16. It came as the result of one of the many times that the Israelites murmured and griped and generally found fault with Moses and God about their situation in leaving Egypt. Keep in mind that Egypt is the spiritual symbol of enslavement under Satan and sin – away from the guidance and

provision of the True God. The Israelites, when faced with any one of a number of challenges that would require them to be faithful and trust in God's great power to deliver, would become fearful and doubtful and long for the slavery of Egypt where they "...sat by the flesh pots, and [ate] bread to the full..." (v. 3). Then they accused God and Moses of having brought them to that particular point merely to kill them in the desert. These were attitudes and actions born out of faithlessness...doubt...fear...ungodliness. The provision of manna provided the Lord God an avenue to better understand the Israelites. How?

The Lord God told Moses the following: "...I will rain bread from heaven [manna] for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain amount every day, *that I may prove them, whether or not they will walk in my law.* On the sixth day of the week, they shall gather twice as much as they do the first five days of the week" (vv. 4, 5; emphasis added). The reason for this is explained in verses 23-30: God did not want them gathering on the seventh-day Sabbath. They were to rest on God's holy Sabbath and congregate to worship Him. If they gathered more than they needed during the first five days, it would turn into worms overnight (vv. 16-21). The double portion they gathered on the sixth day did not turn into worms overnight, so there was no need to gather on the seventh-day Sabbath. In this way, there were two things accomplished: (a) God demonstrated for **40 years** which day is the seventh-day Sabbath, and (b) the people demonstrated to God whether or not they had a heart in them to be obedient.

Notice the problem and how God and Moses recognized those who were disobedient: some gathered more than they needed during the week (vv. 19, 20), and some even went out on the Sabbath to gather it and found none (v. 27). Verse 28 gives us a key question from God: "*How long will you refuse to obey my commandments and laws?*" Indeed! God had given them simple instructions about both. He learned from this situation whether or not they had a heart in them to be obedient. This is the great desire of

God as expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29: “*O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it would be well with them and their children forever!*” (emphasis added). God found out who would obey His instructions about gathering manna each day and who would keep His seventh-day Sabbath holy (Exodus 20:8-11) – about which instruction was given before the 10 Commandments were written in stone for Moses on Mt. Sinai. This experience actually proved to the Israelites on a weekly basis for **40 years** *which day is the true seventh-day Sabbath that the Lord God commanded to be kept!*

Jesus said that this experience with manna – given to Israel for over 40 years – foreshadowed Him (John 6:47-58). Understanding the importance of feeding upon Christ means the difference between eternal life and eternal death. Those who refuse to do it *as instructed by God's own Word* will be cut off root and core! God's provision for *life* shows us three great imperatives: (1) we must recognize that God is the Great Provider – and not worry about having our daily needs met (Matthew 6:11, 24-34); (2) we must recognize that God is the Great Lawgiver, and He has the right to expect obedience from those who partake of His provisions; and, (3) we must recognize that God has made it abundantly clear that He expects those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth to observe His seventh-day Sabbath – not any other day of the week that suits us. **Those who refuse to recognize and practice these things cannot speak for God.**

Aaron's rod is mentioned in connection with the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16 and 17. Korah's argument for his position is found in Numbers 16:3: “...You [Moses and Aaron] take too much upon yourselves seeing that all the congregation are holy, *every one of them*, and the Lord is among them: *why, then, do you lift yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?*” (emphasis added). This is a battle that has been waged for millennia between leaders whom God has chosen and the people over whom He has placed them. For example, Martin Luther, in

his reformation movement against the Catholic Church, asserted what has become one of the great tenets of Protestantism: *every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the authority to read and interpret scripture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads him.* Really? Is that the way God feels about it? Or, is this just another misinterpretation of God's way of doing things? Can you find anywhere in scripture that *you, at this present time*, have been made a *priest* under Jesus Christ just because you have professed your faith in Him as Lord and Savior? Read Revelation 20:6 for a proper understanding of *when* that priesthood will be conferred upon the true believer – the same time at which we will become kings and judges. How did Jesus Christ organize His True Church with regard to leadership under Christ? That's an important question – lest we have the tail wagging the dog. His ministers presently are not *priests* – nor are His people.

Moses was immediately horror-struck and fell upon his face and said something very important to the discerning believer: "...Tomorrow the Lord will show who are His [leaders], and who is holy [that is, set aside for such a holy purpose]; and will cause [that chosen leader] to come near unto Him: even [the leader] whom God has chosen will He cause to come near to Him." Then *Moses* explained how this challenge was going to be handled – ironically, it was *Moses* who was *leading* here.

In verses 8-11, understand what Moses was telling Korah. Korah was from the priestly family of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram were from the Reubenites – Reuben was Israel's first child with Leah (Genesis 29:32). By God's command, Levites not in the family of *Aaron* could not become the *high priest* (see Exodus 28, 29); they served in many other functions among the tribes of Israel (Numbers 1:47-54; Deuteronomy 10:8, 9). The gist of Moses' statement is simple: "It's one thing for you to be a part of the congregation – even to be part of the tribe that serves in the tabernacle, but it is an entirely different matter for you to lay claim to a position to which God has never appointed you: the high priesthood."

In Hebrews 5:4, Paul says: “...No man takes this honor [that is, of being the high priest] upon himself, but *he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*” Verse 5 explains that even Jesus Christ did not make Himself the High Priest of God; it was *conferred* upon Him! Korah, Dathan, and Abiram assumed that being part of the congregation gave them the *right* to claim *equality* in the leadership role to which God had called Moses and Aaron. God’s answer in this conflict was very simple, direct, and definitive: *God calls and sets apart those who are to lead His people into true holiness.* Korah and his confederates did not understand that.

How does this play itself out among most “Christian” congregations in light of something like Ephesians 4:11-15 – the fact that part of the gifts Christ gave to His Church includes *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers?* Do these leaders of the New Testament Church, have the expectation that they will be regarded as *having been called of God and assigned their leadership roles by Him?* In principle – yes. But, how does it work in actual practice? In most “Christian” congregations, the local people control the business and activities of the local church; the pastor is an outsider who comes in at the congregation’s request – supposedly having been led of God to “call” him to be their minister. But...he who holds the purse holds the power. Even a centrally governed denomination does not secure a pastor’s position – the local congregation can put up enough “stink” that the central government would move the pastor to another congregation rather than tolerate the “stink.” Neither of these situations really shows respect for God’s calling out of His ministers!

So, the bottom line seems simple enough: Aaron’s rod is a symbol that *God* has provided us with adequate, able, competent leadership. Therefore, we should trust God’s choice and not be rebellious. Yet, there are those who believe that all believers are *equally* competent to know and teach others. This is bound up in the concept held by Luther that all believers are priests under Jesus Christ and have the right to read and interpret scripture for them-

selves as the Holy Spirit leads them. That would be fine if the result was a unified concept of God and His will. But...there isn't.

Proverbs 17:10 says that the evil person is the one who seeks to rebel – but...God will send a cruel messenger against him. The Prophet Samuel was just such a cruel messenger to the rebellious King Saul. In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel is rebuking Saul for not obeying God's instructions about utterly destroying the Amalekites (v. 3). Saul was not to spare even the cattle. Instead, he took the Amalekite king, Agag, prisoner and kept the best of all the cattle – destroying only "...everything that was *vile* and *refuse*..." (v. 9). When Samuel found Saul, Saul greeted him by saying that he had obeyed God's commandment. Samuel, thereupon, sarcastically replied: "Then why am I hearing the *bleating* of sheep and the *mooing* of cows?" (v. 14). Saul tried to cover up his sin by blaming it on the troops – because *they* did it for a good cause: they intended to sacrifice the good cattle to the Lord God. In the face of Samuel's harsh rebuke, Saul again maintained his innocence and utter obedience and blamed the taking of spoil on the troops, who only wanted the cattle so they could sacrifice to the Lord God at Gilgal (vv. 20, 21). Saul had deceived himself with all of his self-justification.

Then Samuel asked a very pointed, incisive question: "Does God have as great a delight in *burnt offerings* and sacrifices as He does in *obedience*?" This is a common problem. Jesus addressed it in Matthew 7:21-23 by saying that only those who *do the will of God* will enter the Kingdom of God. He says that He will summarily dismiss all of the claims of those who have performed religious actions that are contrary to God's will – and deny that He has ever had any kind of relationship with them. His brother James explains the test of obedience by saying: "Be *doers* of the word and not just *hearers* of it, lest you deceive yourself" (James 1:22-25; emphasis added).

Back to Samuel's stinging rebuke: "Understand this: obedience is better than sacrifice, and submissiveness than the fat of rams."

Why? “Because rebellion is just like the sin of witchcraft/sorcery, and presumption is just like the sin of worshiping false gods” (author’s paraphrase). Read God’s judgment of witchcraft in Exodus 22:18 and Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27. These are very strong words from God’s appointed servant!

So, it should be apparent that *Aaron’s rod* is a two-edged symbol. First, it represents the authority of those called out by God and sent to preach and teach His word. God takes this very seriously. It is His right and prerogative to select those who represent Him and His Kingdom’s business (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Second, it represents the subsequent submission of God’s people to the leadership He has provided. This might be very difficult for people in democratic societies to understand, let alone obey. So...you should remember that God’s government is *not* a democracy; it is a *beneficent monarchy*. You also must understand that not all so-called “ministers” have actually been called out *by the True God*. This is repeatedly discussed in scripture – Old and New Testaments.

The *tables of the covenant* are the stones on which God’s 10 commandments are written. Look at Matthew 22:34-40. A lawyer among the Pharisees put Jesus to the test by asking Him which is the great commandment in the law. Jesus gave him the first and great commandment and one that is like it: (a) love God with all your heart, body, and mind, and (b) love your neighbor as yourself. He sums it up in verse 40 by saying: “***On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets***” (emphases added). All that is contained in scripture is fastened to and depends upon these two great commandments. After citing several of the commandments and saying: “...and if there be any other commandment...”, Paul says that “...love is the fulfilling of the Law” (Romans 13:9, 10). How does that work? *Does love do away with the Law?*

The 10 Commandments, which are the *tables of the covenant*, represent the summarized explanations of the two great laws: com-

mandments 1-4 summarize how to love God supremely, and commandments 5-10 summarize how to love your neighbor as yourself. All of the other laws, statutes, and precepts revealed in the law and the prophets are more detailed explanations of the laws that govern our relationships with God and our fellow man. *Judgments*, essentially, are the decisions made about conflicts among God's people based on the revealed laws. In John 5:39, He says: "Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." Little wonder then that Jesus said that He did not come to do away with or abolish either the law or the prophets (see Matthew 5:17-19). What does this have to do with those who speak on God's behalf? Is this *really* something that is important in New Testament Christianity? How, exactly, do the law and the prophets testify of Jesus – and what relationship does that have with thinking that you have eternal life?

Let's practice our Bible study skills here and apply the method of checking the context so as not to isolate a scripture from it. John 5:39 must be understood in the context of the accusations made by the Jews when Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath (vv. 1-16). They are going to kill Him because of it. When Jesus tells them that He is the Son of God (v. 17), they add the sin of blasphemy to the charges because they say that He claims equality with God (v. 18).

Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6, and Deuteronomy 19:15 lay out the basic principle for condemning a person to death: it cannot be the result of one witness; two or more *righteous* witnesses must testify (see Exodus 23:1, 2). Jesus' defense of His actions and statements, therefore, is going to do two things: (1) He's going to demonstrate that the people *who are accusing Him* are not *righteous* witnesses, and (2) He's going to use two or more *righteous* witnesses – witnesses that these people claim to trust – to testify of the truth of His position. In other words, He is going to use His witnesses to confirm His testimony, which, in effect, will neutralize their condemnation. Take this to heart because His word does

exactly the same thing to those today who claim to believe it as God's truth.

Consider other statements Jesus had made about things that are allowed on the Sabbath. In Luke 13:15 and 14:5, He argued that they all allowed for *humanitarian works* to be done on the Sabbath: watering their animals and pulling them out of harm's way – man is more important. In John 7:21-23, He said that even the law regarding circumcision is carried out on the Sabbath in order to fulfill the law about circumcision on the eighth day after birth (see Genesis 17:9-14). Moses ordered them to practice circumcision because God had required it of Abraham as part of His covenant with him – the covenant that is governed by these laws. In this, Jesus said that they judged according to *appearances*, rather than by what is *right*. That would make them *unrighteous witnesses*. So, Jesus had already confronted similar groups based on their *beliefs* and *practices* and had drawn similar conclusions about them.

On theological grounds, Jesus had argued with some in Matthew 12:5, 6 that the priests in the Temple were allowed to do work on the Sabbath; yet, something greater than the Temple was present: the Lord of the Sabbath (v. 8). Indeed, as the Lord God (Yahweh Elohim) of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ had actually *created* the Sabbath day (see Genesis 2:1-3, John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16, 17, and Hebrews 1:3) and had given the fourth Commandment regarding the seventh-day Sabbath rest (Exodus 20:8-11). In this instance, too, He goes back to their *beliefs* and *practices*.

In v. 32, He refers to "...Another who is testifying on my behalf..." He is referring to God the Father – who is, coincidentally, responsible for the next four witnesses presented by Jesus. Invoking the testimony of God Himself is a bold approach because it is likely to have no practical significance for those who are spiritually blind to the mysterious ways of God. In order to counter that possibility, Jesus draws on things that have had practical significance with regard to their beliefs and practices. He also uses some of His past experiences with them as witnesses against them.

First, He says in John 5:33 that the Jews “...sent unto John [the Baptist], and he bare witness unto the truth.” You can see in John 1:19-36 that the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John the Baptist who he was – thinking that *he* might possibly be the Messiah. They asked him if he was “...that prophet...” (v. 21). This is a reference to Deuteronomy 18:18, where the Lord God told Moses that He would raise up a Prophet like him into whose mouth He would put His words...and He would speak those words without deviation from them. John denied being the Messiah (that is, “that Prophet”), but told them that the Messiah was, at that time, among them.

The next day, when Jesus presented Himself to John for baptism, the Baptist confessed: (a) that Jesus was the Messiah – the Lamb of God, (b) that God had sent *him* to prepare the way for the Messiah, and (c) that God had told him that he would recognize the Messiah when the Spirit of God descended upon Him. The Baptist said: “I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (v. 34). Jesus said that John the Baptist “...has testified to the truth,” but He quickly added that He did not need the human testimony. By using the present perfect tense “has testified,” Jesus was drawing attention to an action begun in the past that continues in the present – so, that testimony still has value. Why is this important as a witness?

In v. 35, Jesus uses an “Elijah” reference by saying that John the Baptist was a “...burning and a shining light...” Jesus will later refer to John the Baptist as the “Elijah” that would precede Him and prepare the way for Him (Matthew 17:10-13). Malachi had already prophesied that “Elijah” would come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5, 6). But, perhaps Jesus’ reference was to Psalm 133:17, which is a reminder to God that He promised David one who would sit upon his throne – a fore-shadowing of the coming of the Messiah. In v. 17, the psalmist prophesies a coming “Elijah” by saying: “...I have ordained a lamp for my anointed.” We can get the full impact of this by reading John

3:25-36 where the Baptist's disciples and "the Jews" (v. 25) questioned him about Jesus going around preaching and baptizing. John tells them that he was sent to prepare the way for the Christ (v. 28), but his role would decrease, and Jesus' role would increase (v. 30). He also testified that God had sent Jesus as the Son of God; therefore, He was the Christ (vv. 31-36). Back in 5:35, Jesus tells "the Jews" that they had been willing to rejoice in John's teachings for awhile; thus, Jesus presents evidence that they actually *enthusiastically boasted* about the ministry of John the Baptist – and...*boasting* means that they took *excessive pride* in his ministry.

Nevertheless, Jesus says that He does not need this *human witness*, as great as the Jews might have thought it was, because He has one that is a far greater witness than that: ***the works that God the Father gave Him to complete***, which also represents the witness of the Father because He commissioned them. The answer was simple: If you know the works of God as described in scripture, then you will recognize them when they are performed! The fact that they did not recognize the works that *God* commissioned made them *unreliable witnesses*.

In John 4:34, Jesus told His disciples that His focus was upon doing God's will and completing ***God's work***. Without getting overly strung out in detail, suffice it to say that He was referring to Elohim's plan for creating man in Their image and providing for man's redemption and salvation from sin (Genesis 1:26-32; Ephesians 1:4-10). Many of them shared Nicodemus's assessment that Jesus was "...a teacher come from God: for no man can do the miracles that you do except God be with him" (John 3:2). In Matthew 11:2, we see John the Baptist, upon hearing of the *works* of Jesus, sending his disciples to ask Him if He was, indeed, the Messiah. Jesus used His *works* as evidence that He was (v. 5). If John (whom they held in high regard and *boasted over*) believed it, why shouldn't *they*?

His third witness, which also came from God, is the scriptures (v. 39). Jesus challenges them to search the scriptures. Why? Well, they have high enough regard for the scriptures to believe that they can find what they need to acquire eternal life. It is apparent that they believe that the One who holds the key to eternal life is revealed in them. If they could only find the One who fits the scriptural descriptions and requirements! However, Jesus says that the scriptures testify of *Him*, but these people would not believe Him and come to Him so they could receive that eternal life. In other words, this most important witness is no good if you are spiritually deaf and blind. On top of that, if someone else were to come with spectacular claims of being the Messiah, they would fall in behind him like rats behind the Pied Piper of Hameln (v. 43; my imagery, not His). The Apostle Paul chided the Corinthians for having the same problem (2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15). It is the same old problem Jesus addresses in v. 44: “How can you believe [God’s revealed truth] when you are more concerned with the approval of one another than you are with God’s approval?” These Jews most generally referred to the great *human minds* among the rabbis as their source of authority and judgment about God’s word.

As Raymond E. Brown puts it in his volume of *The Anchor Bible*: “The quest for human praise is a universal motive, for gaining the estimation of one’s fellow man is a means of self-assurance. But the challenge of Jesus always shakes this assurance. Only when the self-assurance of a man is shaken is he ready to make an act of faith expressive of his dependence on God. The rebellion of ‘the Jews’ against this is a rebellion common to the world” (“The Gospel According to John” [i - xii]; Doubleday & Company, Inc.: New York; 1966; p. 229). Much of Jesus’ work challenged the authority and judgment of even the greatest religious and theological minds among the rabbis. It is easy to see that this created great conflict for Him.

To reject Jesus as an outward manifestation of scripture’s witness of the *True Messiah* was, in fact, to reject the *Father’s* witness

regarding how He intended to draw all men to Himself and reconcile all things in heaven and earth to Himself (see Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:19, 20). The scriptures they had at that time were a witness of this plan and of the True Messiah. Paul says in Romans 10:2, 3 that their zeal for God was real enough, but it was “...not according to [true] knowledge...” because they were *ignorant* of God’s righteousness. They had been more concerned about establishing their own righteousness than they had been about submitting to God’s (see Isaiah 55:8, 9 and 64:6).

How about you? Do you follow a Jesus and a gospel that is not revealed in scripture? A fake? An imitation? A counterfeit brought by messengers who do not speak on God’s behalf – even though the “Christ” and the “gospel” most commonly presented has come from some of the so-called “great minds” of ministers and theologians past and present? Those who twist and pervert the message and meaning of scripture? Are you afraid to stand out from the crowd and be “...a voice crying out in the wilderness...” (Isaiah 40:3)? Or, are you more comfortable following the beliefs and traditions of the majority of so-called “Christian” thought and practice? Remember this: there are *many* pretenders out there (1 John 4:1).

The fourth witness Jesus called upon was Moses (vv. 45-47). Why? The Jews believed that the five books of scripture Moses had written were the very word of God Himself. Moses was the mediator of the covenant with God at Sinai. Even if they held different concepts about how to apply those scriptures, they at least agreed upon those two things. Based on that, Jesus brought to bear His greatest condemnation of their actions: (a) “If you had *really* believed Moses, then you would have believed me ***because he wrote about Me,***” and (b) “If you do not *really* believe *his* writings, then there is no way that you will believe *anything* I tell you” (emphases added). This implies two things: (1) they didn’t *really* understand what Moses wrote, and (2) even if they did, they were still too spiritually blind to see that Jesus was the object of his writ-

ings. The writings of Moses are the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Man is to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4). The focus of all scripture is upon *the Delivering Seed*, who will reconcile all things in heaven and earth to God the Father (Genesis 3:15; Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28). How could they have been so blind to God's plain truth? Their blindness is so much the more glaring because of all of their religious pretenses. Being *religious* is not the goal!

Here is where you learn the awful truth about one of scripture's revealed, spiritual ironies. *Irony* is the incongruity between *what is expected* and *what actually happens*. John 8:12-47 is a good example. Because of some very incisive comments Jesus makes while in a running argument with some Pharisees, they lay their claim to being Abraham's seed and never having been in bondage to any man (v. 33). Seizing the high ground, Jesus says that they are, at the least, the slaves of sin – never mind that they seemingly forgot the numerous years they spent in Egyptian bondage and their present servitude to Rome!

Jesus agrees that they are the physical seed of Abraham – but then He draws a line of distinction to which we all must pay attention: "*If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.* But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that he heard from God: ***Abraham did not do this type of thing. You do not do the deeds of your father***" (vv. 39-41; emphases added).

Then He explained the root of the problem in vv. 41-47, drawing this conclusion: "He that is of God hears God's words: *you do not hear them because you are not of God*" (v. 47; emphasis added). Their *actual* father is Satan, God's adversary. Jesus is not afraid to use this "in-your-face" approach to these hypocrites. It most surely shows the perceptive reader that they did not speak on God's behalf.

Conclusion

Why do people who *claim* to be of God spend so much time *perverting* His word – adding to it and taking away from it? Those who say the Law and the prophets are done away and treat the Old Testament as a religious relic of the past ***cannot speak for God.*** Those who syncretize pagan beliefs and practices – “dry cleaning” them and calling them “Christian” – ***cannot speak a true witness on God’s behalf.*** To do away with the Law and prophets is to do away with a very significant portion of God’s holy word! And...to mix in pagan trash as though it were God’s very own truth is to spit in the face of the One who seeks to add us to His family. To preach *a different Jesus, a different gospel, and a different spirit* from what God has revealed puts you squarely under the leadership and fatherhood of Satan the Devil (compare Matthew 13:10-17 with Isaiah 6:9-12; also, read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 and 11:4, 13-15). The result of such rebellion is to have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear – and a heart in which there is no understanding of God’s truth. That is an awful, spiritual irony! Under such circumstances, ***it is impossible for them to speak anything on God’s behalf!*** I sincerely hope that you understand the implications of this vital truth from God.

Speaking on God’s behalf involves more than preaching *in the name of Jesus*, doing great miracles and casting out demons *in the name of Jesus*, and doing many wonderful works *in the name of Jesus*. If those things are not done *according to the will of God the Father* (Matthew 7:21-23), *in spirit and in truth* (John 4:23, 24), then they are not worth the dust out of which man was created. If you are not willing to speak *the revealed words of God* instead of your own flights of fancy, then do not expect God to support you in your spiritual and scriptural error and grant you any modicum of understanding of His truth – or to provide the spirit by which it works the miracle of spiritual rebirth in your mind and heart, ultimately leading to being born again into the very family of God.

-Five-

The Holy Spirit

It is interesting that, when the Lord God created man out of the dust of the ground, *He did not place an obedient nature within him.* As a matter of fact, He originally made man a living being with a *neutral* spirit. Then, He placed him in a garden in the midst of fruit-bearing trees, one of which, *the tree of life*, represented *life and the holy spirit*, and another of which, *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, represented *death and the unholy spirit* (Genesis 2:9).

Man was told not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 16, 17). From that point on, the Lord God waited and watched to see if there was in man the *desire* to obey Him. Speaking metaphorically, since man did not “eat from the tree of life,” he was not empowered by “holy spirit” to obey and, thereby, resist the temptation by the serpent – the consequence of which mankind has suffered in all ages since. Man wanted to *know* about good and evil – which implies knowledge *gained by experience* as much as it does learning without the experience. In Romans 1:24, 26, 28, Paul reveals that God summarily granted their wish to become their own moral compasses and to suffer the results of *knowing* good and evil: *they would suffer the awful consequences as much as they would the beneficial consequences.* God “gave them over” to that judgment.

It has been necessary from that time to this for mankind to acquire “holy spirit” in order to be saved out of the mess caused by his unholy disobedience (Genesis 3; Romans 8:9-14). This naturally leads us to wonder what that “holy spirit” is – as well as how we go about getting it for our own use and edification. It is not as simple as some suggest, but it is not overly difficult, either. What should become evident in the following discussion is that “Holy Spirit” is not a *person* in the Godhead. I know very well that such a statement flies in the face of centuries of doctrine and faith to the contrary – but it is not the only article of doctrine and faith that is in opposition to the revelation of scripture. Pay close attention.

What is “Holy Spirit”?

The Hebrew word for *spirit* originally meant “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it like this: “The *ruach yahweh* is a term for the historical *creative action* of the one God which, though it defies logical analysis, is always God’s *action*” (VI, p. 367; emphasis added). George Eldon Ladd wrote: “The *ruach Yahweh* in the Old Testament is not a separate, distinct entity; it is God’s power – the personal activity in God’s will achieving a moral and religious object. God’s *ruach* is the source of all that is alive, of all physical life” (*A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 287).

It was God’s *ruach* that “...moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2b). It was the *ruach* of man and animal that the Lord God destroyed from the earth during the flood (Genesis 6:17). It is also the *ruach* that is used in issuing a commandment from the mouth of God (Isaiah 34:16). Nowhere, however, does the Old Testament use this term for “spirit” to mean that it is a “person” in the Godhead or a separate spirit being.

The term *ruach* is used to demonstrate the *power* that God uses to do the work He intends to accomplish. He does this by either exerting that power upon or against someone or something (Gene-

sis 1; Ezekiel 3:12-14) or by putting it into their inward parts to affect their minds and hearts (I Samuel 16:13-23; Isaiah 11:2). As S. MacLean Gilmour wrote in *The Interpreter's Bible* concerning the *holy spirit* that filled Jesus Christ: "In the O.T. the *Spirit* is a sporadic and temporary influx of *divine energy* that enabled certain individuals to see visions, prophesy, or perform remarkable feats of strength" (v. 8, p. 83; emphasis added).

The Greek equivalent, *pneuma*, connotes an *intangible substance* that possesses great power to create or destroy. It is always associated with *power* or *force*. It, like *ruach*, means breath, blowing, wind, air, and spirit as part of one's personality, spiritual state, state of mind, and disposition (1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 1 Peter 3:4; Galatians 6:1). It can even be used in regard to spirits (John 4:24; Matthew 12:43).

The truth is that God *is pneuma*, but *pneuma* is not "God." Both the Father and the Son are *pneuma*, and they use *pneuma* to accomplish their purpose – but *pneuma* is not referred to as being "God." Similarly, when an angelic or demonic being is referred to as being *pneuma*, it does not indicate that *pneuma* itself is an independent being. It merely means that the angelic or demonic being has the *power* of *pneuma* to accomplish its given work. When Jesus compared *pneuma* to the wind (John 3:8), His point was that those who are *pneuma* are imperceptible to the human eye and that they exist on a different level, consciousness, and/or development than human beings. This would be true of any being that is *spirit*.

Those who believe that the "holy spirit" is a "person" in the Godhead refer to the spirit as "he." To them, each of the three "persons" is distinctly and personally recognized as "God." Each is like a role that one God plays. It is peculiar, however, that they can refer to scriptures that specifically call the Father "God" (for example, 1 Peter 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3), and the Son "God" (for example, Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:8), but they cannot refer to a single scripture in which the "Holy Spirit" is referred to as "God."

Finally, in order to get *holy ruach* or *holy pneuma*, one must go to the source by which it is produced. We hear much today about tapping one's inner resources – that humans possess great natural powers within themselves. The truth of the matter is that no such power as *holy spirit* exists innately within mankind, regardless of whatever other “natural powers” they might possess. There are only two sources for such power or force known as *holy spirit*: God the Father and God the Son.

So, what is the *holy spirit*? It is a spiritual *power* or *force* that must be received from God (Acts 2:38). It is a tremendous source of *dynamic, supernatural power* that is available for enhancing our own human minds so that we can begin to conceive of the way God thinks and acts (Isaiah 55:6-11; Acts 1:8). It is the very essence of God Himself – His very life, His mind, His nature – and it imparts *power* to the believer to become a *spiritually-minded* individual (Romans 12:1, 2)) who is motivated by *love* and *holiness* (Ephesians 1:4). And this is the *power* that we must have working within us before we can be *born again* as God’s Sons (Romans 8:9-14) – imperceptible to the human eye! This is the *power* that resides with God (Psalm 62:11b). This is what Jesus meant in John 3:5 when He said that being “[begotten] by the Spirit...” is necessary for rebirth.

The most apt symbol of “spirit” is the wind, which stirs among us in all sorts of ways...but remains totally invisible. We cannot see from where it comes or to where it is going (John 3:8). We can see the evidence of its having been among us and know that it is *power* and *energy*; yet, we also know that it is not ours to command and master and control. And we know that when it comes, it comes from God. *That* is what makes it “holy” spirit. But what does that *mean*?

The *ruach Yahweh* (“the spirit of God”) in the Old Testament (Genesis 2:7) is His breath or life or spirit. It is not a *personage* – not a separate, distinct entity known as “God,” or one of three roles played by a single God. It is God’s active *power* – His personal

power that is released to achieve whatever God wills to happen. This is no different from the meaning of the New Testament term *pneuma hagion*, that is, the holy spirit (John 14:26). At the base of this is the concept of something that is pure, perfect, and worthy of God. It is as though one could translate *pneuma hagion* to read “the spirit of holiness,” “the power of holiness,” or “the power to be holy.”

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus Christ would tell His disciples shortly before His ascension to the right hand of the Father: “You shall receive *power* after the Holy Spirit is come upon you” (Acts 1:8)? This *holy power* would enable them to carry out their mission of preaching the gospel of the kingdom and meet with cheerful readiness and faith whatever difficulties they would encounter along the way. They would have, in effect, the power to think and act as God does – limited, of course, by the fact that they would not have the *full* gift of the spirit of holiness (1 Corinthians 13:9-12; Ephesians 1:13, 14). The *partial installment* would suffice for the present.

Man does not *naturally* have holy spirit. If he did, God would not have found it necessary to remind us that His thoughts and ways are not like ours – that there is a *vast difference* between His thoughts and ways and ours (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Holy spirit has to be given to man in order for him to possess it (Acts 2:38) and be able to think about things and act on them with the kind of mind that God possesses. We should understand that the holy spirit is given to us to affect the way we think and act in relationship to God and our fellow man.

When Paul wrote that we are not to conform our way of thinking to that of this world system, he added that this would be accomplished by “...the renewing of your mind...” (Romans 12:2). When he wrote to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:5), he was insisting that there needs to be a change in the way we ***think*** if we are to become holy and blameless. It is axiomatic that our actions are driven by our

thoughts. Remember Proverbs 23:7: “...As he *thinks* in his heart, so is he” (emphasis added). Changing your *thoughts* changes your *actions*. Therefore, in order for us to have holy minds that drive holy actions, we must have infused into our minds the spirit to become holy. To be *inspired* means that you have *spirit* put into you. An *inspirational* speaker does this by his speech – which affects your *thoughts*. However, you have to remember that God does not *force* you to accept holy spirit. It is something that you must desire and request – something to which you are willing to submit in order to become holy as God is holy (Leviticus 20:7).

Spirit of Power Promised to Man

The holy spirit is not some voice of conscience or some innate spark of divinity as many teach; it is the power to be holy that is given by God to those who will obey Him in Jesus Christ. Paul is very explicit about this in several of his letters to the Church.

In Ephesians 2:18-22, he explains that we have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ *by the Spirit*. The net effect of this infusion of holy spirit is that we become “...fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God...” In other words, there is a change in our status: we are set upon a path that leads to *full inclusion* in the family and government of God. In effect, we become the individual building blocks of God’s holy temple – which He will “occupy” by the dispersion of His holy spirit.

You should not be confused by this as though it is some great mystery. Paul explained this to the Corinthians like this: “...Your body is *the temple of the Holy Spirit* that is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own....” It follows, then, that you do not belong to yourself because, in order for the holy spirit to indwell you, you incur a cost: *you are bought back out of sin through Jesus Christ and are no longer your own person* (1 Corinthians 6:19; emphasis added). What is that cost? Just before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples: “If a man loves me, *he will*

keep my words [that is, be obedient]: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and **make our abode with him**" (John 14:23; emphases added). How do They do this? *By the infusion of holy spirit into the true believer.* Ephesians 2:22 says that this is accomplished *through the Holy Spirit.*

Paul gives a detailed explanation in I Corinthians 2:6-16. This dynamic, *supernatural power* is given by God to become part of our very minds. It is the very essence of God's holy mind, holy life, holy nature. When it mingles with the human mind, it gives to it a *power* – not naturally possessed by man – to live and act with purity, with spiritual maturity, and in a way that is worthy of God Himself. How does this work? Notice, first of all, that God's spirit-filled people have a different understanding of things than the people of the *world system* in which we live (v. 6). This holy spirit represents the *hidden wisdom of God*; therefore, it represents an understanding of truth that even the rulers and wise men of the world do not possess or understand (vv. 7, 8). There are things that the human eye has not witnessed, the human ear has not heard, and the human heart has never conceived that were prepared ahead of time for those who would love God (v. 9). How, then, does man receive this understanding from God?

Paul says that we receive this understanding of the deep things of God through *revelation from God by His holy spirit* (v. 10). In other words, once we have surrendered our lives to God through obedience to Him – that is, by loving God – He begins to educate us about His thoughts and ways. Loving God involves keeping His commandments. Jesus said: "He that has my commandments, and keeps them, is he that loves me...." (John 14:21). John also wrote in his first epistle: "The way we know that we know God is this: we keep His commandments. The person who says 'I know Him,' yet does not keep His commandments, is a liar and knows nothing of His truth" (1 John 2:3,4; author's paraphrase). You can add to that John's statement in 2 John 6: "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments." God has promised insight into His

thoughts and ways – His will and plan of salvation – to those who will be obedient. If you won’t be obedient, then you should not expect to have very deep understanding, if any at all, about how God thinks and acts. But...how does this understanding take place?

Paul explains in v. 11 that one knows himself by his own “spirit” – that is, by his own mind. People may tell you that they know why you do various things or what you are thinking, but they cannot *really know* unless you *reveal* it to them by some word or deed. In that way, you reveal it to them *by your spirit* (mind – remember: thoughts drive action). In the same way, God reveals Himself to us by something that He says or does – placing it into our minds and helping us to clearly understand it. This is the thrust of Paul’s statement to the Romans that “The Spirit itself *bears witness with our spirit...*” (Romans 8:16; emphasis added). Holy scripture is a record of the thoughts and ways of this God, but we cannot *really* understand it until God unlocks its meaning for us. This is called *revelation* – what might be described as an *unveiling* of meaning, *enlightenment*, or *disclosure* (“opening to view or scrutiny”).

Paul discusses this phenomenon in 2 Corinthians 3:13-16: “...[Israel’s] minds were blinded [by God]: for until this day the *veil* still has not been taken away in the reading of the old testament – which *veil* is *done away in Christ*. But even unto this day, when Moses [at least the first five books of the Old Testament] is read, the *veil* is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when [Israel] shall turn to the Lord, *the veil shall be taken away*” (see also Isaiah 6:8-12 and Matthew 13:1-17; emphasis added). Those who have “eyes to see and ears to hear” are those to whom God’s truth is being revealed by His holy spirit. He does this by progressively *lifting the veil* from over their eyes so that they can see His truth more and more clearly.

Finally, Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 that we have received the spirit of God so that we might know the things of God. It is not the same way of thinking that is used by the natural man of this world. It is wisdom from God, made available to those who

love Him, by the infusion of His thoughts and ways into our minds. This *holy* spirit will enable us to “...compar[e] spiritual things with spiritual [or, holy things with what is holy].” Because this knowledge is *spiritually discerned*, the common, ordinary, unrepentant individual will not understand it...but will consider it mere foolishness. Paul concludes by saying that this experience enables us to have *the mind of Christ*. *This* is what God has promised to those who love Him (see also Philippians 2:5) – if they are obedient.

Another apt symbol of “spirit” is water. Jesus compared the holy spirit to “rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jesus Christ is the fountainhead of those rivers of living water. Jeremiah proclaimed: “O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake you shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters” (Jeremiah 17:13). Jesus Himself declared this truth to the Samaritan woman when He said: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, ‘Give me something to drink,’ you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water....Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water *springing up into eternal life* (John 4:14, 17; emphasis added).

Isaiah, under the inspiration of God, cried: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring” (Isaiah 44:3). It is made abundantly clear in the use of such powerful imagery that a person must *sincerely desire* this holy spirit before God will pour it out upon him. In John 7:37-39, Jesus declared: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believes on me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this He spoke of the spirit that will be given to those who believe on Him.”

This spirit was to be made more generally available after Jesus was glorified and ascended to the Father’s right hand (John 14:15-31; 16:7-16; Acts 1:1-11). Ezekiel was inspired by God to proph-

esy: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put *within* you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And *I will put my spirit within you*, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). Even though this passage specifically refers to a reunited Israel, God also made it abundantly clear that He would make His spirit available to all who choose to receive it: “It shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit upon *all flesh*” (Joel 2:28-29).

Paul told the Romans that those who are presently imbued with God’s holy spirit have the “...*firstfruits* of the Spirit...” (Romans 8:23; emphasis added). Since *first* is an ordinal number, then we should expect that there will be others in the future who will receive this outpouring of God’s spirit of holiness. The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21) was merely the *first* outpouring of God’s spirit in fulfillment of these prophecies. There will be others as God completes His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Israel as a Type for Future Christians

While some of the great patriarchs of the Old Testament, no doubt, were imbued with the holy spirit, Israel *in general* was not able to keep the spiritual intent of God’s law because they were a physical, carnal-minded church (Deuteronomy 5:29; Acts 7:38; 51-53). Without the holy spirit, they did not have the strength of character to faithfully keep the covenant they had made with God. God had not promised to make the holy spirit available to them before the ascension of Jesus Christ to the throne of the Father. However, as we have already seen, God did promise that the holy spirit would be made available to all of mankind in the near future.

None of the patriarchs before Jacob were *Israelites*. Many people have the mistaken idea that all of the Old Testament patriarchs were *Jews* – including Jacob. That is a serious misunderstanding. Jacob was the *father* of the *Israelites*. You can see in

Genesis 32:24-32 how Jacob's name was changed to *Israel* after he wrestled all night with God. This event marked his spiritual conversion, so God changed his name from *Jacob* ("one who takes the place of another by force or trickery") to *Israel* ("one who prevails with God").

Notice also the expression in v. 32: "...*the children of Israel*..." You can read about the births of those children in Genesis 29:1 through 30:24 and 35:16-20. Jacob/Israel fathered 12 sons and at least one daughter, Dinah (Genesis 30:21) – all collectively known as *the children of Israel* or *the 12 tribes of Israel* or *the Israelites*. The *Jews* are the descendants of Jacob's fourth son with Leah: *Judah* (Genesis 29:35). All *Jews* are *Israelites*, but not all *Israelites* are *Jews*. This is an important piece of biblical understanding.

Paul wrote that the *Israelites* serve as examples to those of us "...upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). If that is true, then there must have been a great message in God's plaintive cry when He said: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it would be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29). It was God's sincere desire that Israel's children would be converted and become spiritual-minded like their father Israel had done. One must assume that the basic problem was either that God had not made available His holy spirit to them, or that the Israelites did not take advantage of it in whatever way it was made available to them.

Although he was not an Israelite, Abel seemed to have possessed a goodly amount of the holy spirit for him to have pleased God so much with his sacrifices (Hebrews 11:4). So must have many of the other patriarchs who obeyed God and lived prior to Jacob/Israel. It might be true that the holy spirit was not *generally available*, but that does not mean that it was not at all available to those who sought a righteous relationship with God. It is inconceivable that men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and certain unknown prophets (see Luke 1:70) were able to achieve the levels of

righteousness with which they are credited merely through fleshly, human effort. The Jewish king David, after he committed adultery with Bathsheba, deeply repented of his sin and implored God: “Cast me not away from your presence; and do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11). True faith demands the presence of the holy spirit! If their *disobedience* proves that the Israelites could not obey God’s laws by human power alone, what does the *obedience* of the righteous people of faith prove? It must prove that there was a dynamic, supernatural power available to those willing to obey God – even if it was not generally available to the rest of mankind.

The main characteristic that adequately describes the Israelite mind in those days is *carnal-mindedness*. This characteristic precludes the influence of the holy spirit. This is the example with which we must become familiar in order to learn the lesson God wants us to learn from the Israelites. Carnal-mindedness is the state of man’s mind without the power of the holy spirit working in it. According to Paul, it concerns itself only with fleshly things. It is actively opposed to God and His ways, and there is no way that it can be subject to God’s Law. It is altogether impossible for such a mind to please God. It is a mind that leads to *death* (see Romans 8:1-8). Paul says: “There is nothing good that dwells in my flesh. There is a desire to do the good, but I don’t know *how* to do it. I seem to do the opposite of what I want to do....I am such a wretched man! Who shall deliver me from *this body of death?*” (Romans 7:18-24; emphases added). Then, he points out that the spiritual mind is the secret to man’s deliverance through Jesus Christ because it is a mind that brings *life* and *peace* (Romans 8:6b). Finally, he says that we are not carnal-minded, or *fleshly*, if the spirit of God dwells in us – the absence of God’s spirit means that we do not belong to Him (v. 9).

Simply put, that means that we will never have eternal life without God’s spirit dwelling in us. We are destined to eternal death (see John 3:18). That is what he means by the expression

“this body of death.” Fortunately, God’s great mercy and love for mankind has led Him to make that **holy** spirit available to him. Again, what is that **holy spirit?** It is a spiritual connection to the mind of God Himself! It is the means by which we can understand, desire, and achieve God’s goodness and love.

Paul tells Timothy, his “son” in the ministry, that “...God has not given us the spirit of fear; but He has given us the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). That means that we will not only know what the good is, but we will also know how to perform it. It means that we will have our minds renewed and be able to discern the will of God (Romans 12:2).

That spirit is available to mankind today. Jesus promised this “Comforter” before He was crucified. He called it the **spirit of truth** and said that it will teach us all the things He needs us to know and will help to bring them to our minds when we need them (John 14:26; 16:13-15). Paul says that God uses His spirit to reveal to His people what “...Eye has not seen nor ear heard...the things that God has prepared for them that love Him....The spirit searches the deep things of God and reveals them to us. [In effect, as a result of the indwelling of the spirit of God,] we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:9-16; see also Philippians 2:5-13). Paul also tells the Galatians the result of having the holy spirit to guide our hearts and minds: “When [the carnal mind] is at work, the results are obvious: fornication, gross indecency and sexual irresponsibility; idolatry and sorcery; feuds and wrangling, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels; disagreements, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and similar things. I warn you now, as I warned you before: ***those who behave like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*** What the spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There can be no law against things like that, of course. You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all the self-indulgent passions and desires. ***Since the spirit is our life, let us be directed by the spirit***” (Galatians 5:19-25; emphases added).

There are many more references that could be shown to press the point, but what has been cited should be sufficient. The point is simple: without the holy spirit, you simply do not have true access to God's thoughts and ways or to eternal life. Otherwise, you might have a *facsimile*. You might have a *clue*. But...you don't have the *real thing*. Clearly, then, the "holy spirit" plays a central role in preparing the believer for the redemption of his body, that is, for salvation (Romans 8:22-28). It is the means by which we have contact with the mind of God so that we can become holy as He is holy (vv. 14-17). Paul warns those who have entered into this spiritual relationship with God: "Do not quench the spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The Power of Complete Rebirth

It would stand to reason that a person's whole life and attitude of mind must be completely changed as a result of the work of God's holy spirit (Romans 12:1, 2). Paul said: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:23, 24). This process of change is supposed to create a "new man" in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). Although this "new man" is a spiritual conversion, it is not the same as being "born again." Being "born again" is not simply a spiritual conversion; it is a miraculous transformation from flesh to spirit that would not be possible without a super-natural act of Almighty God! It is a *complete rebirth* of the individual from flesh to spirit composition. It is by the indwelling of the holy spirit of God that you *begin* that journey that will lead to your complete rebirth. The receiving and indwelling of the holy spirit of God is a *renewing of the mind*. The conversion and complete rebirth both require a ***miracle!***

God pledged Himself to perform this miracle upon your ***real*** and ***thorough*** repentance (Acts 2:38). But God ***will not*** set into motion your mental/spiritual change unless you are willing to total-

ly surrender to Him and submit yourself to the process until it is complete! We must have this power in order to be *born again* as the sons of God (John 3:1-3; 4:23, 24; Romans 8:14) at the future, appointed time. This will be more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. Right now, please try to understand the foundational concept involving the complete rebirth.

God is in the process of forming His *spiritual* creation in man. Only those who have yielded to the power of His holy spirit will become His sons and enter into eternal life. Those who have done so are in a training period at present, learning how to rightly direct the even more vast powers that God will give us when we are re-born as His spirit-composed children. Few grasp how great and all-powerful God really is, and His loving kindness in making it possible for us to have His mind and great power.

By now, you should be fully aware of the reason “holy spirit” is necessary in the salvation process. It is the means by which we become “holy.” If we are to become part of a “holy” family, then we must become “holy” so as not to besmirch the holiness of the family. The Lord God told the Israelites after He had led them out of Egypt (a type for sin): “For I am the Lord your God: you shall therefore set yourselves apart for holy usage, and ***you shall be holy; for I am holy***: Neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. For I am the Lord that brings you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ***you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy***” (Leviticus 11:44, 45).

The Lord God had just delineated between the clean and unclean meats. Part of becoming holy is to the things that must not be put into our hearts, minds, and bodies. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 that our bodies – and that includes our hearts and minds – are the members of Christ. As such, they should not be made unclean by bringing them into contact with that which is unclean. The basic idea is that the body of the true believer is the container into which the “holy spirit” is put. It should be regarded

as and treated as “holy ground.” If it is holy to God, then it should be holy to you.

Haggai pointed out a simple lesson in cleanness when he spoke by the influence of the Lord God to those who were concerned about the temple they were building after they returned from the Babylonian captivity: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests concerning the law, saying, If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and it touches bread, pottage, wine, oil, or any other meat, does it make those things holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then Haggai said, If one that is unclean by a dead body touches any of these things, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, Yes.” The point is simple: Becoming “holy” is not a matter of casual contact – like brushing up against something else. Holiness is something derived from direct contact with God. We are made holy because we are given “holy spirit.” Uncleanness, however, is pervasive, and it cannot have direct contact with God. It must be gotten rid of before direct contact with God is possible. This is why Peter told the crowd on the day of Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit” (Acts 2:38). This baptism is a washing away of the defiling sin. It represents a symbolic death from which you are symbolically resurrected to a new life (Romans 6:3-7). It represents a reality that Christ commits Himself to actualize at the appropriate time in the future.

Once that ritual is completed, we are to have hands laid upon us by God’s true ministers for the receipt of the holy spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 9:17). This confers upon us the holy spirit and seals us as a begotten child of God who is headed toward salvation (Ephesians 1:13, 14). Notice that Paul says that the receipt of the holy spirit is a *down payment* (earnest) “...*until* the redemption of the purchased possession...” (v. 14b; emphasis added). Contrary to what is commonly taught about being “born again,” that redemption/new birth has not yet occurred. But...God has placed His seal upon the truly

repentant, baptized individual as a *guarantee* that the redemption will take place if the individual continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (compare 2 Peter 3:18 to Hebrews 6:1-8).

-Six-

God's Pre-Determined Plan and Will

Who or What is “God”? What is meant by “the will of God”? What was the purpose for the creation of mankind? How has that original purpose and will been faithfully taught throughout the passing millennia? It is important for the person who genuinely desires to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24) to understand these questions. There has been an insidious effort afoot for millennia to pervert and change God’s truth into a lie (Romans 1:25). Only by understanding and obeying God’s pre-determined will and plan can one enjoy their eternal benefits (see Matthew 7:21-23).

Psalm 8 is a beautiful psalm of praise for the Creator God. It is filled with David’s wonderment about the majesty of God’s name in the earth and His glory in the heavens. Perhaps the most provocative part of this psalm is found in verses 3–8. This is provocative because it excites; it arouses a sense of peculiar identity that nothing else in the vastness of the universe possesses; it points toward a destiny that is far beyond man’s own making. And David found it singularly astonishing that God would condescend to be mindful of puny man and crown him with *godlike* glory and make him “to have rulership over the works of [God’s] hands...[and] put everything under his feet” (v. 6). “What is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him?” he wondering-

ly asked in verse 4. In this rare moment of provocative thought, we have a window – no, a gateway – into God’s great purpose for creating mankind in His own image and the plan He laid out to accomplish it. We have a glorious, intimate view of the eternal, unfailing will of God. This is a view that is not generally known in most traditional “Christian” churches in the world.

David’s question in v. 4 is not so much a request for a definition of what man is as it is a question about why God would *involve* Himself with him. The second part of David’s question is largely ignored for some unknown reason: “...and the son of man, that you should visit him?” It appears that it is not enough for God to simply contemplate man and what he is doing and thinking. In addition, instead of God conducting His business with man from a distant heavenly throne, He actually comes to see man in order to comfort or help him, as well as to correct and/or punish him – either as an act of courtesy or in a “professional” capacity. Apparently, He also comes at times to dwell with man as a guest. The definition of the Hebrew word *paqad* (visit) is very interesting: “to come to with friendly or hostile intent” (Strong’s Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible, James Strong, 1890, p. 96). This is in total agreement with the English definition: “To come to or upon as a reward, affliction, or punishment” (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Co., 1974, p. 774). Consider one biblical example out of many that are possible.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 is a perfect example. The Lord God appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre and enjoyed a meal with him. When He had concluded His business with Abraham and Sarah (v. 10), He said this: “...The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down [there] now [from this place], and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to me; and if *not*, I will know it [based on the information gathered during My *visit*]” (vv. 20, 21; emphases added).

In this one chapter, we find two excellent examples of David's second question: (a) the Lord God *visited* Abraham for a good reason – a blessing/reward, but (b) He *visited* Sodom and Gomorrah for a hostile reason – to destroy it with fire and brimstone. It also elicits the first question: *Why should God get so personally involved?* This story also helps us to understand God's *omniscience* – that is, whether He has the ability to know *everything in advance* of its occurrence.

Our objective in this lesson is threefold: (a) We are going to get a biblical definition of what man is; (b) we are going to understand why God is concerned with man's thoughts and ways, and what He intends to do with regard to either rewarding or punishing him; and (c) we are going to understand more fully who/what "God" is. This is a powerful piece of understanding. Be sure to read everything completely and look up all of the scriptures cited.

To understand the answer to David's questions, we must go back to the beginning of God's plan and attempt to understand when, how, and why it was put together. We must also attempt to understand *what that plan was supposed to accomplish and any time lines He might have drawn for doing so*. What we will discover will differ significantly from what is commonly taught. The importance of such a discovery is echoed in Hooper's previously-cited statement: "Regardless of one's education, it is impossible to decide whether Christianity is true or false if you do not know what it is *about*...there are many today who do not know *what the real issue is.*" (C. S. Lewis, *God In The Dock*, p. 9).

The *real issue* involves the relationship that has existed for millennia between God's truth and those who are the daughters of Babylon the Great (Revelation 16:19). The *real issue* involves Mother Babylon's influence in changing God's truth into a lie (Romans 1:25). Few know or understand how the tentacles of "Mother Babylon" (see Revelation 17:1-6) have reached out and gathered in so much of what is called "Christianity" today.

The Two “Beginnings”

Scripture reveals that there was an unknown expanse of time before God created anything – a time during which God’s plan was formulated and finalized before it was set into motion by His creative acts. The Apostle Paul wrote that this occurred “...*before the creation of the orderly universe...*” (Ephesians 1:4; emphases added). Some details about the biblical accounts of this strategy meeting (and other important accounts that contain very few details) will be added as a result of *inference*, that is, the drawing of conclusions that are not otherwise stated but are based on the *known* facts and premises. The known facts and premises, in essence, *presuppose* such inferential conclusions – they are not the result of some willy-nilly fancy. This is similar to *a priori*.

It is not wrong to infer, but it will be engaged in with fear and trembling because of admonitions in God’s word not to add to or take away from its messages. For example, see Revelation 22:18, 19: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book [that is, The Revelation]: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (see also Deuteronomy 4:2). Isaiah provides some of the formula for proper inferences in Isaiah 28:9-13 in his description of those who mock God’s prophets. It is in the “...line upon line...precept upon precept...here a little...there a little” (KJV) approach to biblical interpretation that we are able to put together the pieces of God’s plan and will through inference where God’s word does not specifically reveal it with a “Thus says the Lord...” statement.

It is in letting the Bible interpret the Bible that we prevent, as much as possible, making this a matter of *private interpretation*. Peter said: “For prophecy **never** had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”

(II Peter 1:21; emphases added). There is no desire here to spread a private, personal interpretation of God's word. But there is a great desire to see the record set straight about God's plan for mankind – to see the centuries-old “traditions of men” put into their proper place because they have helped to change God's truth into a lie and lead people astray (Matthew 15:1-9; Romans 1:18-25). May God grant us the blessing of the Spirit of Truth to guide us in making correct inferences in the instances when God's word does not reveal to us the plain truth (see John 14:15-17, 26).

There are two “beginnings” spoken of in the Bible: Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1. John 1:1 covers that span of time before God created the things spoken of in Genesis 1. “Genesis” means “beginning.” It speaks of the creation of various things involving more than that mentioned in Genesis 1 (for examples: the beginnings of marriage, families, nations, different languages, covenants, et cetera); whereas, John 1:1 does not. Understanding this is an important key to understanding much about why man exists, why God is mindful of him, and how God is going to crown him with godlike glory and put all things under his feet.

John 1:1, 2 says some interesting things that are largely overlooked by Traditional Christianity and, by default, not believed or taught. In this “beginning” existed a Being named “The Word.” It is John's inspired testimony that the Word “was **with** God in the beginning.” Here is where it gets a bit sticky. The meaning of this phrase is that the Word **accompanied** or **fellowshipped with** or **partnered alongside of** another Being known as “God.” Think very carefully about the implications of that explanation. In fact, the Word Himself was *also* a God-class Being! In other words, there were in this “beginning” **two** God-class Beings who were closely associated with one another: the Word (God) and God (the Father). The Word was the agent through whom everything was created (v. 3), but the Two worked together to make it so. The introduction of the trinitarian doctrine of “God” has obscured this important concept from many who seek the truth.

Genesis 1:1 provides a clue to this mystery that is little understood in a monotheistic, Trinitarian Christianity that conceives of “God” as being one single individual who manifests Himself in three different ways: as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. In other words, most Trinitarians believe that *one* God plays *three* different roles as situations demand. However, the phrase “In the beginning **God**...” reveals a great deal more to us than many would like to admit or believe.

The word translated “God” is “**Elohim**.” The “-im” ending makes it a plural noun. This same plural ending is attached to words like **cherubim**, **seraphim**, **nephilim**, **Sepharvaim**, and **Nethinims**. Such nouns use a singular verb just like most uni-plural (or, collective) nouns do in some applications. For instance: class, family, herd, group, and church are uni-plural (or, collective) nouns in the English language. They are plural entities that sometimes act in unity and, therefore, receive a singular verb (for example: “The church [*which is made up of many members*] **is** going to have a revival”). Use of the singular helping verb **is** means that this is something they will do as a single unit.

So, Genesis 1:1 tells us exactly what John 1:1-3 told us: there were at least two Beings who, in the beginning, were responsible for creating all that exists. Genesis 1:26, 27 bears this out when it says: “Let **us** make man in **our** own image, in **our** likeness....” Some claim that these verses show that the **plural of majesty** is being employed. That kind of literary device is used when, for example, a judge, not wishing to “talk down” to a defendant, might say to the accused: “So, **we** have stolen a horse. What shall **we** do about this?” Well, it is plain that the judge did not help the accused to steal the horse – and the accused would be content to do nothing about it! But, there is no language difficulty here. Genesis 1:26, 27 is not an expression of **plural of majesty**, **intensification**, or **plural of potentiality**.

The verses go on to say: “So [Elohim] created man in **his** own image, in the image of [Elohim] **he** created him.” We do the same

thing in English when we say: “The family lost *its* dog” (the dog belonged to the *entire* family) or “The class completed *its* assignment” (the entire class had the *same* assignment). Such type of grammatical construction simply follows the rules governing uniplural or collective nouns: it simply indicates a *plurality* acting in *unity*.

“But,” others would refute, “this is God the Creator (singular) addressing the members of His heavenly court – you know, the various kinds of angels, e.g., cherubim, seraphim, archangels. They are all eternal beings – part of the same cut of cloth. And... since this constitutes a *plurality* of beings, *us* and *our* are appropriate references here.” This would be a very good argument were it not for a couple of things to which we must pay attention, i.e., “in our own image” and “in our likeness.¹” This is probably the best question that could be asked for this problem because God’s word gives us a great answer for it! That answer will probably astound you because it is not taught by Traditional Christianity. In explaining it, we will understand more about what man is and why God is so interested in him (notice how I use *him*, a singular pronoun form, as a reference to *man*, a collective noun in this case).

The Many “Sons” of God

Paul wrestled with a fundamental question in Hebrews 1 and 2 about the difference between God-beings and angels: *Is Jesus Christ (the Word) superior to the angels? If so, how is He superior?* Paul began by referring to Jesus Christ as God’s *Son* (Hebrews 1:2). This term, as will be shown, has a *family* connotation that is not afforded to the angelic realm. It is important that you pay attention to the logic used by Paul in making his case that Jesus is superior to the angels in just that manner. Jesus is “familly”; the angels are not. As *Son*, He is a separate Being from the Father – they are not one and the same Being – but, He is a *different* Being from the angels in at least one important way.

In Hebrews 2:5-13, Paul took up David's question from Psalm 8 and talked about God bringing many sons to glory and being *in the same family*. It is a mistake to think that Paul answered David's question by pointing to Jesus Christ as the *only* one "...made a little lower than the angels..." (Hebrews 2:5-9). All of humanity was made a little lower than the angels. Paul gave an even more astounding answer than that in v. 10 when he said that God is in the process of bringing *many sons* to *glory*. The Greek term Paul uses for *glory* is *doxa*, which is defined by *Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich* as being "The state of being in the next life...described as *participation in the radiance or glory [of God]*" (p. 202; emphasis added).

This is a reiteration of Hebrews 1:3 – showing, in effect, that all who are God's *sons* will share the same nature. Peter declared the same thing when he wrote that Jesus Christ gives us great and precious promises that will make it possible for us to "...*participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 2:4; emphasis added). John also supported this when he wrote that, although we are now called "sons of God," we do not know precisely what we shall become beyond this life. He assures us, however, that whatever we become will become consistent with what He is (1 John 3:1, 2). Paul also revealed this to the Corinthians when he wrote: "...Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven [that is, the resurrected Jesus]" (1 Corinthians 15:46-49; see also Psalm 17:15). We can infer from these statements that we are *in the process of being brought to glory* simply because we have not yet been *glorified*.

Therefore, we should understand that Paul's statement in Hebrews 2:11 means that He who makes men holy and those who are made holy *are to become the same family*. Some translations like the *New International Version* actually translate it to say exactly that. For that reason, he says that "...Jesus is not ashamed to call them *brothers*, saying: 'I will declare your [God the Father's]

name to my **brothers**...Behold me and **the children** God [the Father] has given me [to bring to this glory]” (vv. 12, 13; emphases added). Thus, Elohim’s objective has been to expand the Elohim family by creating mankind and bringing them to “glory” through Jesus Christ.

Fundamentally, then, when Paul spoke of bringing those sons to “glory” and “salvation,” he addressed the need for a change in their **composition** – from flesh to spirit. The type of spirit to which the change would be made is **God**-spirit, not **angel**-spirit. He addressed that in Hebrews 1:3: “The Son is the radiance of **God’s** [i.e., the Father’s] glory and the **exact representation** of his [i.e., the Father’s] being” (emphases added). In other words, if Elohim was making man in their own image and likeness, they were aiming at creating mankind to become sons who are *the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being!* Are the angels eternal beings in the *same way* Elohim is? Are they part of the “same cut of cloth”? Are they part of the *same family*? These questions are fundamental to Paul’s argument. Please pay close attention to the logic involved.

Read verse 4: “So he [i.e., Jesus Christ] became as much **superior** to the angels as the **name** he has inherited is **superior** to theirs” (emphases added). Remember that Jesus Christ was “God with us” (Matthew 1:23) and The Word who “...became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14). This same Word gives to all who receive Him “...the right and privilege to become God’s children [i.e., members of the **God** family] – children not born of blood [that is, with bodies of flesh], nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12, 13). The point Paul made in Hebrews 1-2 was that Jesus was the first of many brethren to be changed from the flesh into the **God-family composition** that is superior to **angel composition** – that is, Jesus was the first human to have been “born again” (see also Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:20; and Colossians 1:15, 18). The difference is in the **family** to which they belong.

Paul argued this point before King Agrippa in Caesarea before he was sent to Rome. In Acts 26, he explained to Agrippa his faith and conversion on the road to Damascus. He explained how he had been confronted by Christ and converted to the faith he espoused. Then, in an effort to validate the gospel he preached, Paul said: “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come....” What was it that the prophets and Moses said should come? “***That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead....***” (v. 23; emphases added). *No human has ever been raised from the dead and changed from flesh to spirit except Jesus Christ. Not before. Not after. Jesus was the *first* to do it, and, up to our present day and time, He is the *only one* to have done it* (see Peter’s comment in Acts 2:29-35)!

Notice Hebrews 1:5: “For to ***which*** of the angels did God ***ever*** say, ‘You are my ***Son***; today I have become your Father?’?” (emphases added). Paul pointed out further that the superiority involves reigning on a throne with God (vv. 8, 9, 13). The Father has *never at any time during their existence overtly* promised – or, *covertly* considered offering – ***any angel*** sonship or co-rulership at His right hand. That is something reserved for ***family members***. He finished by saying that the angels are “...ministering spirits sent to serve *those who will inherit salvation...*” (v. 14; emphasis added). And what is salvation but being added to the family of God through Jesus Christ? Being ***born again*** is the method by which that occurs.

Jesus told Nicodemus the secret: “The truth I am telling you is this: no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ***Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*** It should not surprise you when I say, ‘You must be ***born again.***’ When the wind blows, you hear its sound, but you cannot tell from where it comes or to where it is going. ***So it is with everyone born of the Spirit***” (John 3:5-8; emphases added).

A fundamental change in composition must take place in order for the individual to travel in such a manner. You can see an example of this in John 20:26 where Jesus simply materialized in the room where the disciples were gathered *behind locked doors!*

Moses found out something about the name of the Lord God (the God-being who eventually became Jesus Christ) that sheds additional light on this matter. When the Lord God called Moses to go to Pharaoh, Moses asked Him by what name he should call Him. The Lord God said, “**I am who I am**....This is my name forever...” (Exodus 3:14, 15). At the end of all the discussions about the meaning of this name, the single most important point is that this Being is *self-existent*. This quality of life is called “eternal” because the Lord God has always existed and has never in that eternal life condition depended on any other being to keep Him alive. The Elohim family are *self-existent!* The “eternal life” they will give to their sons will not be life that taps into some continuum that goes eternally backward and eternally forward. It will consist of a quality of life that is *self-existent*. In other words, it will not depend on any other being in existence to keep it alive.

The angels are *created* beings that do not have that quality of life because they depend on Elohim for their existence! An example of this can be seen in Ezekiel 28 where God addresses Lucifer, a guardian cherub (vv. 14, 16), that is, an angel, about his rebellion and sin. The KJV says, prophetically speaking of a future event: “...Therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall *devour you*, and I will bring you *to ashes* upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you” (v.18; emphases added; see also Revelation 20:10). One should be able to see the difference: angels might be *immortal*, but they are not *self-existent*. All of this proves, therefore, that Elohim was not using the plural of majesty when He said “Let *us* make man in *our* own image” because *the angels do not bear the same image as Elohim!* God can and will *destroy* rebellious angels because they do not have self-existent life. However, in bringing His *sons* to glory, God will give them a

quality of life that surpasses that of the angels and a name that is by inheritance greater than that of the angels.

Jesus and the Father are not the Same Being

We also know that the Word (God) and God (the Father) are **separate** Beings because Jesus Christ told us so. Moffat translated John 1:14 in an interesting way when he wrote: “So the Logos became flesh and tarried among us; we **have seen** his glory – glory such as an only son enjoys from his father...” (emphases added). In this statement, John testified to the basic fact that the glory of Jesus Christ **had been seen**. Peter, James, and John were with Jesus at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9), so they got a glimpse of what He would be like once He returned to His former glory (John 17:5). Many saw Him on the day He ascended to heaven from Mount Olivet (Acts 1:9-12). John, as if to punctuate the difference between the Word and the one with whom He accompanied in the beginning, wrote in John 1:18: “**No one has ever seen God** [i.e., the Father], but He has been *revealed* by the only divine Son, who sits at His Father’s right hand” (emphases added). This would be a strange thing to say if there is only one Being called “God.” In John 6:46, Jesus said: “No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God [i.e., Jesus Christ Himself]; only He has seen the Father.” So there appears to be a distinction made between these two Beings – one who **has been seen** (Jesus Christ) and one who **has not been seen** (God the Father) by anyone **except** the Son.

The first reaction many have is that “God” was seen in the Old Testament. However, they might not agree that the Exodus account of Moses seeing the backside of the Lord God is a valid example (Exodus 33:12-23). They will say that Moses saw His glory, but not His face. Or, they will say that he saw only *part* of His glory, but not the glory of the **triune** God in all its fullness. Exodus 24:9-11 says: “Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and

the seventy elders of Israel went up and *saw the God of Israel*....But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; *they saw God*, and they ate and drank" (emphases added). Jesus did not say in what form or to what degree the Father had not been seen; ***He said no one had ever seen Him!*** Clearly, one member of this Elohim had been seen and one had not! In Matthew 11:27 Jesus said: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those [to] whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Part of the mission of Jesus was to reveal the Father's existence. The *Lord God* of the Old Testament is the one who became Jesus Christ.

In John 10:30 Jesus said: "I and the Father are ***one***." He did not mean "one and the same." The Greek word from which this is translated actually means that Jesus and the Father are in unity...in agreement. It is the same oneness that is spoken of in Ephesians 5:22-33. Note especially that Paul used marriage as a type of this unity. He quoted Genesis 2:23, 24: "...A man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall be ***one flesh***." He used the same word in I Corinthians 6:12-20 to argue that having sexual relations with a prostitute makes a man ***one*** with her. Paul did not mean "one and the same." He was talking about a type of unity. Also, John 5:26 reveals another aspect of this one-but-separate idea: "For as the Father has life in himself [self-existence], so he has granted the Son to have life in himself [self-existence]." This indicates separate Beings, not one with two or three identities. Finally, John 17:5 reveals Jesus' prayer to resume the type of composition that He had alongside of the Father before He became flesh, as well as the fellowship and/or partnership He enjoyed at the Father's side (see also Mark 14:62, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, and Colossians 3:1 for additional insight). Clearly, they are two separate God-beings. This is an important concept to understand as we continue this study because it is not taught or understood among the churches in mainstream Christianity.

The God Who Redeems

Now, remember that we are going to understand why man is so important to God. In Psalm 8 David addressed this question to the Lord, otherwise known as the Lord God. We have seen thus far that there is one God (Elohim), but Elohim consists of two separate Beings who are identified as ***The Word*** and ***The Father***. Paul added emphasis to that idea when he wrote in Ephesians 1:3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis added). One would wonder how Jesus could be His own God and Father if He were the only God in existence, who merely plays three different roles: the Father role, the Son role, and the Holy Spirit role. Paul was demonstrating that Jesus was subject to a Being of greater power than His own. Understanding this helps you to understand how Jesus could claim that the Father is ***greater*** than He is (see John 14:28), as well as how something like the second coming of Christ could be concealed from the angels ***and*** Jesus Christ – and known only by the Father (Matthew 24:36). How could such a momentous occasion be concealed from the “Son role” if He were the same Being as the “Father role”? It also helps you to understand many other things that are confusing when read with the mind-set of Traditional Christian doctrines and teachings. This is why you must see with new eyes (Matthew 13:10-17).

In Genesis 2:4, the ***Lord God*** is introduced. He is a character that is separated out of ***Elohim***, which is the identity used from Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:3. His name translated from the Hebrew is ***Yahweh Elohim*** – some translate it ***Jehovah Elohim***. It is as though He has a personal designation (that is, ***Yahweh***), and a family designation (that is, ***Elohim***). While many in Traditional Christianity know this, they do not teach it separate from the Trinitarian concept of “God.” Some of the greatest names in Traditional Christianity admit that explaining the concept of the triune God is a most difficult task. Yet, many make the attempt.

For instance, Dr. C. I. Scofield commented about Genesis 2:4 in his reference edition of the King James Version: “The primary meaning of the name Lord (Jehovah) is ‘the self-existent One.’ ...He is ‘the self existent One who **reveals Himself**.’ ...It is significant that the first appearance of the name Jehovah [Yahweh] in scripture follows the creation of man. It was God (*Elohim*) who said, ‘Let us make man in our image’ (Gen. 1:26); but when man...is to fill the scene and become dominant over creation, it is the Lord God (*Jehovah Elohim*) who acts. ***This clearly indicates a special relation to Deity, in His Jehovah character*** [this is a Trinitarian reference], ***to man, and all scripture emphasizes this***” (C. I. Scofield, D.D., Ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1945, pp. 6-7 [read footnote #2 in its entirety]; emphases added).

Scofield essentially made the point – and a very important point it is – that “Jehovah is distinctly the *redemption name* of Deity.” He emphasized this by pointing out that Jehovah sought the sinning Adam and Eve and clothed them with coats of skin through an atonement sacrifice for their sins. As pointed out above, Scofield agreed that “The first distinct revelation of Himself by His name Jehovah was in connection with the redemption of the covenant people out of Egypt.” Scofield’s intention in this commentary was to demonstrate that a single God-being acted in a certain role and, therefore, was afforded another name to describe that role. While this is certainly true of Yahweh Elohim and the various roles He plays as savior, healer, protector, comforter, et cetera, no true Trinitarian would ever admit that Yahweh Elohim is a *separate* God-being. They are monotheists, i.e., believers in a single God-being who fills the roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Scripture reveals otherwise. It is vitally important for you to understand this most astounding revelation!

The *real issue* is this: Elohim is the God family, which presently consists of Jesus Christ (the Lord God) and the Father. They are not one and the same Being; they are separate, self-existent Beings

who, in the beginning, decided to make man in their own image. The One who actually created everything was The Word (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17), or The Lord God (Genesis 2:4-7). At the time they decided to do this, nothing else existed – ***not even the angels!*** That’s another reason we know that Genesis 1:26, 27 is not spoken in plural of majesty or potential (see further explanation below). They had decided to create man in Their image long before the words in Genesis 1:26, 27 were ever uttered.

This is an idea of the utmost importance in understanding Elohim’s plan. So, you have to consider the significance of the *names* of God (*Father, Son, Most High God, Lord God*, and *Savior* – for examples), and you have to prove to yourself that *Elohim* is a family. You also have to consider the roles of the individual Beings in *Elohim*. You have to consider Their plan. While *many* teach about “God” and “Jesus Christ,” their messages are empty of the fundamental, *revealed* truth about Elohim’s plan. Understanding how this plan was laid out should make it easier for you to understand the concept discussed above. I know that it probably is not the “religion” to which you are accustomed. But do not dismiss it outright.

God’s Plan as Laid Out by Paul

Ephesians 1:4-10 introduces the plan and lays it out in the context of a pre-creation meeting of the minds between these two God-beings. Paul addressed this so powerfully and tellingly: “For [God the Father] chose [mankind] in [Jesus Christ, the Redeemer] **before the creation of the world** [that is, of the orderly universe – *kosmos* (Greek)]...He predestined [that is, decided ahead of time] us to be **adopted as his sons** [that is, put into Their family] **through Jesus Christ**...to be put into effect ***when times will have reached their fulfillment***” (emphases added). These are the basic elements of the plan – beginning before anything was created and culminating “***when times have reached their fulfillment.***” The

plan was to adopt mankind into the God family, i.e., Elohim family, through Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. In order for Elohim to adopt mankind, he first had to be created. In order to have a “redeemer” or “savior,” Elohim had to anticipate situations and/or conditions from which mankind would have to be “redeemed” or “saved.” If mankind did not conform to Elohim’s will that they live holy, blameless, and loving lives, He could not successfully complete His plan if He summarily killed all sinners (Romans 6:23). The condition from which man would have to be redeemed is that of the temporary, fleshly body (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). Remember: *redemption* involves two things – release from the bondage of sin and release from *finiteness* (see Romans 8:23).

In effect, the Father and the Word were looking at all possible scenarios and planning contingencies for them. For example, how would you give your new creation freedom of choice if you would not allow for wrong choices? If your new creation makes wrong choices that are not part of “holiness” and “blamelessness” (v. 4), and for which you would destroy them (Romans 6:23, Ezekiel 18:20), how would you redeem or save them if they all came under the condemnation of the sin? Also, how do you take a *finite* being made of matter and change it to an *infinite* being made of God-spirit? All of this had to be worked out before Elohim created anything! There is no indication of how long it took them to plan it out from start to finish. So, Elohim decided that the *Lord God* would be the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16, 20; Hebrews 1:2, 3; Romans 8:19-23).

As a matter of fact, this was such a unique position that ***even the Father would not be known by that name.*** There would be no other Being in all of existence known as *Savior* or *Redeemer* or *Lord God* (Yahweh Elohim). Peter boldly proclaimed this fact before the Jewish Sanhedrin: “Salvation is found in ***no one else***, for there is ***no other name*** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; emphases added). ***That is clearly a reference to Jesus Christ alone.***

This helps us to more properly understand Paul's instruction in I Corinthians 8:5, 6. It does not make any difference that man submits himself to many gods and lords, there is ***only one God the Father*** and ***only one Lord Jesus Christ***. This is also emphasized in his instructions to the Ephesians about the unity of the Church: "There is...***one Lord*** [and]...***one God and Father of all***" (4:4, 5; emphases added). Both are ***Elohim***, but they serve different, unique functions in unity in that family. Even though Isaiah 9:6 proclaimed that the Son would be known as "the everlasting Father," the intent was that He would exercise the power of the Father – not ***be*** the Father. This is most forcefully expressed in Matthew 28:18, where Jesus proclaimed: "All power is ***given*** unto me in heaven and in earth." The Father ***gave*** that power to Jesus Christ so He could complete the work He had to do in bringing many sons into the Elohim family. The temporary nature of it is demonstrated in I Corinthians 15:24-28, where Paul said that Jesus must reign until He has put down all the enemies of God, including death. Once that is accomplished – because that is the work of the Savior – He ***will subject*** Himself ***again*** to God the Father and lay all the power at the Father's feet. How do you do that if you are one and the same Being?

Philippians 2:5-11 describes more of this process of Jesus submitting to the Father by calling it the "...mind that was in Jesus" (v. 5, KJV). Notice verse 6: "Who, being *in very nature* ***God***, did not consider equality with God [i.e., the Father] something to be grasped..." (emphases added). Barclay said, in summary, that "being" is a Greek term (***huparchein***) that is not the common word for "being." This word speaks of the very essence of a person that is unchangeable – that a person possesses unalienably, i.e., it cannot be taken away from him. It is innate, unchangeable, unalterable characteristics and abilities that, regardless of all circumstances of change and time and chance, remain the same. "In very nature" is a Greek word (***morphe***) which describes the essential form which ***never*** alters. Jesus was ***God*** before He became flesh. After He

became flesh and dwelt among us, He was “**God with us**” (see Matthew 1:23). **God** was his **morphe**.

When Paul said that He was “...made in human **likeness**” and “being found in **appearance** as a man,” he used the Greek term **schema**, which describes that essential part of a person that continually changes. All through one’s life his **schema** changes. As God-in-the-flesh, Jesus’ **schema** changed from the time of His conception until the day He died, but His **morphe** did not (William Barclay, B.D., *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1963; pp. 44-46). This is important information for understanding the real issue about Elohim’s plan and will.

The Word/The Lord God and His **Companion** came to a point in the pre-creation planning stage where a decision had to be made (Ephesians 1:4 – before the creation of the orderly universe). Paul declared in Philippians 2:6 that the two were **equals** and that the One who became Jesus Christ did not *grasp* at that equality. Barclay pointed out that there was no need for the One who became Jesus Christ to *snatch* at equality as though it were something that He did not possess, because He possessed it by right. Neither did He hug it jealously and refuse to let it go by fighting to keep it. He became subordinate. In other words, of His own will He gave it all up, or He relinquished Himself of it. Jesus said in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” This is part of the process by which the Father chose us in Jesus Christ. This is part of the facts that lead us to infer that there are two God-beings working in unity to develop a plan for creation. This is part of the answer to David’s question about why the **Lord God** is so mindful of man – to the point that He would condescend to make him ruler over all His works and bestow His own Godlike glory upon him! Now, why would Jesus willingly let go of His spirit composition?

We have already seen in Hebrews 2:10-13 that God intends through Jesus Christ to bring “...many sons to glory...” and to make

them Jesus's brothers and the children of God. If that is what Elohim was planning, They, no doubt, had a contingency plan for the possibility that sin would occur. If, in spite of sin, They wanted this family to be formed, They had to have a means by which sin could be atoned for and eradicated so that it would not infect the God family yet to be formed. One of these Two would have to become Redeemer/Savior. Paul put it in a way that presents the Word as *volunteering* to do so – perhaps even *spontaneously* when the prospect of such a thing first came up. Maybe He was the One who saw the path this type of plan was going to take and, before it even occurred to His Companion, said: “This is going to require a severe measure like such and such, so I volunteer to do whatever it takes to make it successful.” And that is why He has been so intimately involved with the creation, history, and ultimate salvation of mankind. He is the one who willingly laid down His life for His friends, a principle He taught His disciples in John 15:13.

Summary

Whether He is referred to as Jehovah Elohim, Yahweh Elohim, the Lord God, Jesus, Messiah, Christ, or Jesus Christ, He is still the Redeemer, the Savior, and the Lord of the Covenants – both Old and New. He is unique from the One known as Father. As a result of His decision to become the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, the Word was exalted to the highest place and given a name that is above every name except the Father’s in the God family. He became subject to the one known as God the Father, i.e., He willingly subordinated Himself to the other member of Elohim when, clearly, He had every right not to do so.

Lest we forget, the Father also did not grasp at the equality that He had with the Word. Had He been jealous of the Word, He could have simply let Him rot in the grave after He died the death of the human flesh. But the Father used His great power to not

only revive the Word from the dead, but to give Him power to have life in Himself, i.e., self-existent eternal life. He restored life to the Son. The Father changed Him from flesh to God-spirit composition as an example of what is to occur in the future periods of salvation mankind will ultimately experience. As a pioneer of this experience of being “born again,” Jesus Christ was the first to ever experience it, as well as the only one since to have experienced it. Our day is coming.

Remember Hooper’s comment: “Regardless of one’s education, it is impossible to decide whether Christianity is true or false if you do not know what it is about...there are many today who do not know what the real issue is.” Throughout history, there has been a concerted effort to distort and pervert God’s true gospel. It has been done in a sly, treacherous, seductive, subtle, and cumulative manner. This has been achieved through false ministers who are enlisted as the pawns of Satan the Devil to preach “**another Jesus**,” “**another gospel**,” and “**another spirit**” (see II Corinthians 11:4, 13-15). These ministers generally do not even know that they are the pawns of Satan, but they are used by him, nevertheless, to sabotage God’s truth. One of the means by which this sabotage has occurred is found in the general misrepresentation of who/what “God” is.

Traditional Christianity has generally portrayed “God” as a single God-being who plays three different roles: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is generally referred to as **monotheistic Trinitarianism**. The Bible, however, gives us adequate information to infer, or conclude, that God, that is, Elohim (plural; Genesis 1:1-2:3), is a *family* that presently consists of at least two Beings who have self-existent life; that is, they do not depend on each other or any other source in creation to give them life or to maintain their existence. One of them revealed Himself to mankind from the time of creation; the other one did not. Yahweh Elohim, i.e., the Lord God, developed the revealed relationship with mankind and became the Savior, Redeemer, Lord of the Covenants, and Jesus

Christ. God the Father worked invisibly and unknown behind the scenes. Jesus, in effect, came to reveal the existence of the Father during His ministry. It was by the power of the Father that the Lord God became flesh and was resurrected from the dead. It is at the Father's right hand that the Lord God sits and waits for the time when He will establish the Kingdom of God on the earth for 1,000+ years.

Elohim are not in the same family with angels; they are superior to the angels in name and spirit composition. Angels, in fact, are created beings that have not lived eternally; therefore, they depend on Elohim for life maintenance and perpetuation. ***No angel at any time*** was promised that he would become a member of the Elohim family and rule on a throne over his “enemies” (Hebrews 1:13). Angels were created to be “ministering spirits” to mankind (v. 14). However, before They created anything else, Elohim intended to create mankind after the ***God***-kind. Man was not intended to become an angel, nor was the One who became Jesus Christ originally an angel like Michael the archangel – or, the brother of Lucifer, as some teach. Inherent in this is God’s ***grace*** even before anything was created. There was nothing man could have done to deserve, earn, or pay back what Elohim was going to do in creating him in the image and likeness of “God.” Once this plan was finalized and each Personage in Elohim knew His role, they set out to begin the creative process.

The True Gospel

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus told His disciples: “This *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and *then shall the end come.*” While this sounds good, it comes hard on the heels of a problem that Jesus said would be faced by true believers of the future: Prior to this, there will arise false religious and/or political leaders who will introduce a change in the true gospel. Individuals will propagate their own versions of the gospel, rather than the one that Christ preached (v. 5). Our task as true believers is to discover and deliver the *true* gospel of Jesus Christ – not the *false* gospel of the pretenders.

The Gospel According to the Prophets

We face exactly that problem today. There are thousands of different denominations, and each teaches its own version of a gospel that appropriates the name of Jesus Christ. In today’s religious parlance, this is just man’s way of achieving the same goal by using different measures. Is that *really* what is going on – or are we witnessing before our very eyes the fulfillment of Jesus’ own words in Matthew 24:4, 5? Many consider it religiously and politically incorrect to make such a statement. It smacks of the religious leaders of Israel, during the days of Amos, who would not rebuke the people for their idolatry nor allow anyone else to do so (Amos 7:1-13). The idea then and now is that *any* worship that is given in God’s name is okay.

However, Jesus pointed out that there is a dividing line between what is *true gospel* and what is not. The prophets taught that God was going to send His Christ/Messiah to establish His kingdom on the earth. Without being exhaustive about it, let's look at two examples that should suffice to make the point: Isaiah and Daniel. Isaiah proclaimed, under the inspiration of God, that "in the last days" the Lord's government will be established above all others on the earth. Nations will come to it in order to receive the teachings from it that will lead to peace and well-being for all peoples (Isaiah 2:1-5). Daniel was shown by God that a "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" is going to smash all the other governments of the earth – breaking them into pieces and consuming them – in order to establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed or revert back to human rule (Daniel 2:44, 45).

If we count Abraham as a prophet of God, then we could learn a lesson or two from him, too. Paul wrote in Hebrews that God's purpose for calling Abraham and establishing His covenant with him was to show Abraham "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (compare Hebrews 11:8-10 to Revelation 21:1-4). The "foundation" symbolizes the permanence of the City, as opposed to being a pilgrim and stranger and living in tents. The fact that Paul refers to it as a *heavenly* City has nothing to do with it being located in heaven. It indicates that it will be a product of God, who lives in heaven. Consider, for example, Revelation 21:1-4 as the fulfillment of Abraham's expectation. Notice where God the Father's throne will be. However, most denominations do not teach *a kingdom on the earth* ruled over by Jesus Christ and the Saints. Their version says that the believer will be rewarded with a home in heaven. Some even go so far as to say that Jesus made "heavenly" promises to Christians and "earthly" promises to the Jews. They claim to be "new testament" in this approach. But, what did Christ want the true believer to believe?

When He went to Galilee to begin His ministry, Jesus came "*preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God*, and saying, 'The

time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and ***believe the gospel***” (Mark 1:14, 15; emphases added). That message has been perverted by many who proclaim that the Kingdom of God is established in the hearts of men once they profess belief in Jesus Christ as Savior. This makes about as much sense as the statement that the second coming of Jesus occurred when the Holy Spirit was sent on the Day of Pentecost! In spite of the fact that God is prophesied to intervene in the affairs of mankind in order to prevent the annihilation of mankind and the destruction of the planet (see Matthew 24:21, 22), they prefer to go merrily on their way with such specious teachings. That underscores their inability to rightly divide God’s truth!

Before Jesus was born, an angel told Mary: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and ***He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end***” (Luke 1:32, 33; emphases added). This demonstrates that Jesus is to reign on an actual throne *on the earth*, not just spiritually and invisibly in the hearts of believers. Matthew 9:35 shows that the entire ministry of Jesus was spent preaching the gospel of this coming kingdom.

The idea of the Kingdom of God being established on the earth was bound up in the question the disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 24:3: “What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” It is also bound up in their question in Acts 1:6: “Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” In His prophetic message to the Apostle John, the Living Christ revealed the same idea: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). He also revealed that “He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15).

The Saints of Christ will be made “...unto our God kings and priests: and...shall reign *on the earth*” (Revelation 5:10; emphasis

added). They will reign with Him for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4-6). This is the fulfillment of yet another Old Testament prophecy given by Zechariah: “The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you....And the Lord shall be King over *all the earth*” (14:5-9; emphasis added). This also proves that the Kingdom of God is not the so-called “Church.” The early Church of God believed in the literal return of Jesus Christ to set up a literal kingdom on this earth that will set about to re-teach mankind how to live according to God’s will.

A Historian’s Comment

The world-recognized historian, Gibbon, said in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: “The ancient and popular doctrine of the *Millennium* [that is, the 1,000-year reign of Christ] was intimately connected to the second coming of Christ....Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon the earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection.” This was John’s witness in Revelation 20:4-6. The message of Christ’s future establishment of God’s rule right here on the earth was proclaimed by Christ Himself, Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles and evangelists, as well as by numerous secular historians – Gibbon being merely one of many who did so. This message is the heart of the true gospel of Christ! This is the message that must be preached to the entire world before the coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:14). But...is it the message that is now being preached by so many so-called “Christian” denominations? We have been warned.

Why are men so ignorant of this vital truth today? Simply because they live in ignorance of the countless prophecies that clearly reveal that God has ordained that Jesus Christ will **rule** this earth, teach men the **way to peace**, and show the whole world **the right way to live**. Your Bible shows that this is going to occur after a de-

finite series of events – and after mankind has had time to write lessons in human suffering, showing once and for all that his own ways only lead to death! (Proverbs 14:12)

Jesus Christ: The Special Messenger about the Kingdom

Every now and then there is a comment in scripture that seems to be at variance with the entire idea of spreading the gospel of the kingdom to the entire world. At the same time, if you understand certain aspects of the fight of faith, it makes perfect sense in the context of the larger message of scripture. This is what is called a *paradox*: it is contrary to common sense; yet, it is found to be true. John 3:31-34 is such a scripture.

John wrote: “The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony.” Then, as if to leave room for that exception to the rule, John wrote: “The man *who has accepted it* has certified that God is truthful.” What is the sense of this paradox? What does it have to say about the spreading of the gospel of the kingdom of God to the entire world? We will see that Jesus Christ was a special messenger sent from God, but His message has been largely ignored by the very ones who profess to be His followers! This is a very baffling paradox, wouldn’t you say?

John 12:49, 50 says that Jesus was sent by God to speak a message from which He could not deviate. Jesus said: “For I do not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.” In John 14:24, He said: “He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” The language is not difficult to understand: Jesus was sent from God the Father with a specific message from which He could not deviate.

Jesus began to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God in Galilee shortly after He was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:14, 15). He began calling His disciples in order to teach them how to spread the same gospel. What did He mean when He said that the Kingdom of God was *at hand*? Were these people expecting a message about believing on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in order to acquire their personal salvation so they would be able to go to heaven when they died? No such idea is indicated in scripture – Old Testament or New Testament.

Other scriptures give us indications about how His message was interpreted. Notice John 6:15: “Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.” Why? Verse 14 showed that they were of the opinion that Jesus was the Prophet who was supposed to come into the world (see Deuteronomy 18:15). Their reaction to this belief was to come and make Him king because they believed that the Prophet would be the messianic king who would throw off the yoke of oppressive worldly governments – especially the Roman government of their time – and restore the kingdom to the status and majesty of the Davidic Kingdom at the height of its power.

Jesus’ Kingdom Not What They Expected

Jesus was not shy to admit to Nicodemus that He had come from heaven (John 3:13). And John wrote: “...The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives [to Him] the Spirit without limit” (v. 34). In spite of this, we know that John had stated already that “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11). Before His crucifixion, He cried in disgust over the attitudes of His own people: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those which are sent to you [by God Himself], how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, only to have you reject me?” (Matt. 23:37). The matter be-

comes a little clearer once you understand that Jesus was sent primarily to “His own,” i.e., the Jewish people of His day, to preach the message of the gospel concerning the coming of the kingdom of God (Matthew 15:24). What was the result? His own did not receive Him or His message. Instead, they crucified Him. Only a very few of the Jewish nation ultimately received Him and accepted His message.

When Jesus was taken before Pilate (John 18:33-37), he asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. Jesus was curious: “Did you ask that as a personal question, or did someone tell you that I am the King of the Jews?” Pilate, somewhat indignant, replied: “Am I a Jew? Your own people delivered you to me. What have you done to deserve this?” The answer Jesus gave to Pilate should be considered carefully. Jesus replied: “*My kingdom is not of this world* [Greek: kosmos]: *if my kingdom were of this world* [kosmos], *then would my servants be willing to fight to prevent me from being handed over to the Jews: but now* [Greek: nun] *is my kingdom not from this place* [i.e., not from this kosmos]” (emphases added). How, then, could it be **at hand**? Many believe that Jesus was telling Pilate that His kingdom is not on the earth – that it is in heaven. Remember that I said to consider Jesus’ answer carefully. The important thing is what Jesus **meant**, not what traditional teachings **say** He meant.

Kosmos has many meanings in the Greek language. In this case, **kosmos** means the world and everything that belongs to it; all that is at enmity with God (and entirely at odds with anything divine), ruined, and depraved (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*; The University of Chicago Press, 1957, page 447, definition #7). It would be very difficult to believe that Jesus would be just another king in a long line of kings and rulers of this world system who have never served the True God well for very long, if at all. But, would this suggest that heaven is a better place to put the kingdom than is the planet earth? We would do well to re-

member that the problem has always been with the *inhabitants*, not the *place of habitation* (Hebrews 8:6-10).

When He said, “*Now* is my kingdom not from this place,” He was not speaking of the present time or the specific place. The Greek word translated “now” shows that He was speaking of the kind of situation that has prevailed upon the earth at any given time under man’s rule. In other words, Jesus was telling Pilate that His kingdom would not have tolerated the circumstances that have been extant upon the earth. By extension, one should be able to extrapolate from this that His kingdom, when it is set up, will not be run like the kingdoms of fleshly, sinful mankind. He was not insinuating that it is in *heaven* waiting to be populated as saints die.

Pilate moved away from “King of the Jews” and asked: “Are you a king, then?” Jesus answered: “You are correct in saying that I am a king. In fact, I was born for the purpose of being a king, and I came to the earth to bear witness of the truth [i.e., presumably, about His being a king].” After crucifying Jesus, Pilate mockingly put up a sign on the cross in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that read “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews” (John 19:16-22). Regardless of that mockery, and regardless of the way mankind has misinterpreted Jesus’ plain words about setting up a kingdom, it is plain that His disciples, at least, understood that it was to be a kingdom located on the earth (Acts 1:6, 7). The real issue centers on whether or not those who *claim* to be the disciples of Jesus Christ have actually accepted His own, personal testimony. Unfortunately, it appears that they have go far astray from His gospel of the Kingdom in favor of a gospel that promises *heaven* to the saved. Pay close attention to the arguments in next section.

Have the Followers of Jesus Accepted His Testimony?

Mark 1:1 is translated a couple of different ways: some read that it was the beginning of the gospel *about* Christ, while others

read that it was the beginning of the gospel *of* Christ. The difference in meaning of these two prepositions can be significant. The Apostle Peter told Cornelius: “You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” The common mistake made by many well-meaning people is that they assume that the gospel is primarily a message *about* Jesus Christ Himself. So, they “preach Christ” and believe that the purpose for doing so is to get people to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior so they can receive salvation and go to heaven. This, to them, represents *the gospel*. Even when they append “of the kingdom of God” to it, they believe it means that the kingdom of God is set up in their hearts – and that they are destined to go to heaven when they die.

Notice this very frank admission from a large, mainstream, “Christian” denomination: “...While God’s sovereignty over the natural universe is presented in the New Testament, *the major emphasis is placed upon God’s reign in the hearts of all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior. Jesus sought to guard against the idea of an earthly territorial kingdom*” (Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 1971, pp. 98, 99; emphases added). This suggests two things: (a) the Kingdom of God is set up *in the hearts of men* – not upon the earth as a literal governmental entity; and, (b) the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament disciples and writers were subject to wrong interpretations of the truth Christ taught them.

Another writer says: “The kingdom is the reign of God, his sovereignty over mind and heart and will, and in the world. It is sonship to God and brotherly relation with men. It is the future. But whenever a human life is brought into harmony with the Father’s purpose, it is present” (Frederick C. Grant, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 7, 1951, p. 656). Is this what Jesus meant when He said that the kingdom of God is *at hand*?

In his exposition of Mark 1:15 in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Halford E. Luccock wrote: “**The time**...means simply the time fore-

seen by the prophets, the time fixed in God's foreknowledge.... **At hand**...can scarcely mean 'has arrived,' but only 'has drawn near'; nevertheless, *the kingdom is still approaching*, it is drawing ever nearer, i.e., *it has begun to arrive*" (Ibid., p. 657; italicized emphasis added). There is good reason why Jesus said that the Kingdom of God had ***begun*** to arrive. Please pay very close attention to the logic involved here.

What Constitutes a Kingdom?

There are four things necessary to constitute a ***kingdom***: (a) territory, (b) king or ruler, (c) citizens or subjects, and (d) laws and government. Therefore, we would define the True Gospel as being "***the good news about a king who will exercise legal rule, according to commandments, statutes, and laws, over his subjects in a designated territory.***" God established the territory, i.e., the earth, when it was originally created (Psalm 24:1-5; 25:12, 13; 37:9). He provided inhabitants on the earth who could, under the proper circumstances, become the citizens of the kingdom He is going to establish. He also provided the legal means by which the affairs of the kingdom could be conducted by establishing commandments, statutes, and laws. Finally, the Father commissioned His Christ to come as a messenger to proclaim the truth about that kingdom – and to commission generations of spirit-led ministers who would faithfully continue to spread the good news. That Christ would become the King at the time appointed by the Father – and not before (see Ephesians 1:9, 10).

Clarence Tucker Craig wrote: "The 'kingdom of God' means the kingly rule or dominion of the God who is believed to be the sole God of the universe. The emphasis is upon his sovereignty rather than upon the place where that sovereignty is exercised. ***Still the local significance cannot be excluded***" (Ibid., p. 145; emphases added). Indeed! To exclude the *local significance* – that is, the *place* where it is to be located – is to deny the truth of the testi-

mony of Jesus Christ, His prophets, and His ministers. Most importantly, it is to deny the plan and intention of God the Father who sent Jesus Christ with the message from which He could not deviate.

It is a shame that so many do not preach the gospel of the imminent establishment of God's ***personal*** control over the earth and the personal preparation that we should make as we anticipate its realization. This is the truth that Jesus brought. This is the message that He intended His true ministers to preach. Those learning the truth about it should know that it ***is to be*** a kingdom on the earth ruled over by Jesus Christ and His saints (Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:44, 45; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 5:10; 11:15). The last part of Daniel 2:45 is not be ignored: "...the great God has made known...what shall come to pass in the future: ***and the dream is certain and the interpretation of it is sure***" (emphases added).

-Eight-

A New World Ruler

Jesus was born to be a king (John 18:36), yet He did not assume that position while He was on the earth. Some have concluded that He has assumed a *spiritual* kingship and will become the “Lord” of our lives and “rule” in our hearts if we invite Him in. They assert that it is *self-evident* that God has sovereign power over the entire universe, but that the major emphasis of the New Testament is placed upon accepting Christ as Lord and Savior and allowing God’s reign to take place in your heart. Is that *really* the message of God’s word? Why have such a universe if heaven is the ultimate home of the “saved”?

They teach a second coming; they teach that Christ is to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords; however, they rob the gospel of its truth and power when they assert that the Kingdom of God is *not* going to be an observable government that literally reigns over all nations on the face of the earth for 1,000+ years. Instead, they teach that Jesus’ second coming is for the purpose of taking the saints back to heaven where they will live in peace and splendor for eternity. Can you *prove by scripture* that such is the case?

When you are supposed to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), how much difference does it make in what you *teach* about God’s message to mankind? Does God hold you responsible for teaching things that make Him to appear to be a liar,

or things that misrepresent His true message? The Apostle Paul made a case for that in 1 Corinthians 15:12-15 where he showed that it is wrong to misrepresent God's message.

There were those who taught that Jesus was really a spirit that materialized Himself in the human form – but...He left no *footprints* when He walked the roads of Israel – so, He did not *really* die upon the cross. Because of this, He was not resurrected from the *dead*; He simply assumed His spirit form and went to heaven. Their point was simple: there is, therefore, no need for a resurrection because the *real person* in the human is an immortal soul that inhabits the human body. When the body dies, the soul is released to return to heaven or a place of punishment.

Paul said that such teachings *utterly misrepresent* God's message about: (a) what the human being is, (b) the true humanity of Jesus Christ, (c) what death is, and (d) the absolute necessity of the resurrection of human beings from death and the grave in order for them to have any kind of life after death. Jesus also made a case for that when He said: "In *vain* do they worship me, *teaching the commandments of men as though they were [God's true] doctrines*" (Matthew 15:9; see also Galatians 1:6-12; emphases added). Today, people who claim to be "Christians" and claim to believe in God's word of truth are no different because they have been influenced by centuries of man-made traditions in which God's word has been added to and diminished. Those who are thus deceived by the traditions of man do not even suspect that they have been deceived.

Let's understand God's truth about the rulership of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. If we are to understand and obey the truth of God's ancient and present message to mankind about the coming Messiah, then we must understand the nature of His literal, observable kingdom and this soon-to-come world ruler. The central question has to be this: *Why spend so much gospel capital focusing on a kingdom on the earth if the plan is actually to take all people of true faith to heaven?*

Caught Between Two Worlds

People of faith are caught between two worlds: the one that presently exists and the one that is to come. The very heart and core of the concept of a coming Messiah is the expectation that He will conquer the *earthly* and *spiritual* enemies of God and subject all of them to His rulership.

The problem with getting people to understand that concept is caused, in large part, by the interval between the coming of Jesus Christ as the crucified savior and His coming as the victorious Messiah/Christ. Since the visible return of Jesus Christ has not yet occurred, then neither has the establishment of His literal, observable Kingdom. However, being caught between these two worlds – and expected to act as though one already lives in the world to come – is a difficult position, that is, one must accept the Kingship and Lordship of Jesus Christ, as well as abide by the laws of the Kingdom ***as though it were already established.*** How do we understand this properly?

The Apostle Paul, in discussing Abraham's great faith, wrote that God "...speaks of those things that do not presently exist as though they already exist" (Romans 4:17b). Should we accept Jesus as Christ and King of our lives? ***Absolutely!*** Should we, thenceforth, live our lives as though He presently rules all of the earth? ***Absolutely!*** Does this mean that He has already *accomplished* that which the scripture says He is to accomplish? No, but by faith we believe that it is as good as done. Does that eliminate the literal truth, spoken by God through His prophets for millennia, that He intends to have His Christ rule the earth? No. We're simply caught between two worlds and have to figure out what we must do to be obedient until the Kingdom actually comes.

How do we ***know*** that God intends to set up a literal, observable government on the earth? Surely this would be easily discerned in His word from Genesis to Revelation! Surely there would be plain, unmistakable evidence in the record pointing out

the reality of such a plan! If there is, how did it get changed to another message that is not even remotely the same as that which God has revealed? Let's look at the record.

One of the first things God (the Father and the Lord God) decided to do with mankind when They created them was to give them **dominion** over the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). That word means that mankind was to maintain **rulership** and **authority** over the earth – not only the plant and animal life that occupied the earth, but also the human population that would eventually spread over the face of the entire planet. How were they to conduct themselves?

Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:4 that "...God chose [the redeemed] in Christ before the foundation of the created universe that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love...." Apparently, this would have been under the tutelage of the Lord God (the member of the Godhead who later became Jesus Christ) with the assistance of the angels (see Hebrews 1:14). Notice in Genesis 2 how He created and instructed mankind. This has been covered in a previous chapter.

Satan the Devil sabotaged this plan by enticing Adam and Eve to sin against God (Genesis 3; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4). One would correctly suppose that this sabotage merely set into motion the necessity of man's **redemption** from the sinful condition – not God's abandonment of His plan to make mankind rulers *over the planet*. The fact that God originally decided to redeem mankind in Christ – even before mankind had ever been created – shows that God understood the possibility of mankind going astray from His plan. Why have a Christ-in-waiting if there is no possibility that God would need Him?

Did the judgment of the Lord God in the Garden of Eden stop the work of Satan? Did it prevent mankind from falling under his influence any more? Unfortunately, no. The truth of God is hidden from those who have been blinded by the god of this world system, that is, Satan the Devil (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4). Paul wrote

in Romans 1:24-28 that “...God **gave them up** to uncleanness...God **gave them up** to vile affections...God **gave them over** to a reprobate mind...” because they chose not to be obedient and they changed God’s truth into a lie.

These expressions carry with them the idea that God determined to allow mankind to suffer the natural, built-in consequences of such rebellious choices. In order to make that point clear, generations of mankind would have to learn that each time they submit to a temptation they make themselves more vulnerable to the next one. Paul’s point in this section is that two things happen as a **natural** consequence: sexual aberration and social degeneration – both of which distort all human relationships. If they continue to pursue such a lifestyle, they will also come under the **ultimate** judgment of God (see Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23). *Allowing multiple generations to pass in order for them to learn that lesson does not mean that God, therefore, changed His plan about the planet earth.*

All generations between the Garden of Eden and the Flood proved to God that they could not rule the earth the way He wanted it ruled. So, He destroyed them in a great flood. The problem was simple: “...God saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination, purpose, and desire of the thoughts of his heart were perpetually evil every day” (Genesis 6:5). Could God accomplish His purpose when that was the prevailing attitude among mankind? No – something would have to change.

Genesis 10:8-14 shows the rise of Nimrod as a world-ruling kingdom builder whose home-base was Babylon. Many sources reveal that Nimrod considered himself to be the “seed of the woman” prophesied in Genesis 3:15. In fact, in Isaiah 14:4-23 he was revealed to have been the pawn of Satan. Because God did not want the work of Nimrod to succeed, He scattered people all over the earth after He had confounded their language (Genesis 11:1-9). Through all of this, God was teaching us a valuable lesson: if you

turn your back on His revealed truth, you will be left to suffer the terrible consequences. Needless to say, that message has long since been ignored!

When God chose Abraham to be the Father of the Faith, He did so in order to further reveal what His plan for mankind is about. Look at Hebrews 11:8-10, 16: "...Abraham...was called to go out to a place which he was about to receive for an *inheritance*...he lived in *the land of promise*...expecting the city which had the foundations, whose builder and constructor was God...He has prepared for them a city" (*The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews*, p. 177; emphasis added). Ask yourself this: Why should Abraham *expect* a city built by God to be in the promised land – the land he would inherit? Did he understand so little of God's intention and will that he got it all confused? Should he have understood that God was pointing him to *heaven* instead of the *earth*? It is, after all, called "a heavenly country." Does that mean that it is heaven itself? Or, at least, *in heaven*?

No, it means that the land they sought was one with a peculiar characteristic not seen in the kingdoms of this world. Look at verses 14-16. To Paul, it was clear that they called themselves "pilgrims and wanderers" because they were looking for a "fatherland." They could have easily returned to Haran and had a "fatherland." The fact that they left Haran showed that they did not consider it worthy to be their home. Note this: "Just as the author of Hebrews was the only author in the Bible who called the land of Canaan 'the land of promise' (11:9), so he was the only one to call it a 'heavenly' land (11:16), ***but it is clear in both instances that Palestine was the land intended***" (*Ibid.*, p. 191; emphases added). You can see the boundaries of the "land of promise" in Genesis 15:18. The "heavenly country" means "...that it is a divine land which God himself has promised" (*Ibid.*, p. 192). There is nowhere in the Old Testament where any of the great Patriarchs of the True Faith ever expressed any desire to go to heaven. They expected to inherit *the land of promise* right here on earth. And...

God went to lots of trouble to promise it, swear an oath about it, establish covenants concerning it, and lay out its boundaries (compare Genesis 15 with Hebrews 6:13-20).

The “Acid” Test

Let’s apply an “acid” test to this situation. This is important because there is the prevalence of teachings that say God made “earthly” promises to the Old Testament saints and “heavenly” promises to the New Testament saints. Did God do such a thing; that is, promise the earth to the saints of the Old Testament and heaven to the saints of the New Testament? Well, let’s use some New Testament thinking to get our answer.

Hebrews 6, in referring to God’s covenant with Abraham, says that God not only made the covenant binding with His *promise*, but also with His *oath*. I like the translation in *The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews*: “So when God wanted very much to show the heirs of the promise the *unchangeableness* of his will, he imposed an oath on Himself, so that through two *unchangeable* things in which it would be impossible for God to falsify [lie], we who have recourse [in the oath and promise] may have a strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us, which we have as a secure and steadfast anchor of the soul...” (vv. 17-19a). This presupposes that God’s intended will *could not be changed* even by Him without Him suffering some kind of self-imposed penalty. The ritual described in Genesis 15 is the *oath* that was added to the promise. The nature of that ritual is such that the ones who walk among the carcasses are swearing that they will die in like manner if they are not faithful to their oaths. It is evident that it was only the Lord God – the one who became Jesus Christ – who walked among the carcasses. No, His crucifixion was not a penalty imposed for breaking that oath; His crucifixion was determined before the foundation of the orderly universe.

Would Jesus Christ come along and change that promise to the Father of Faith? According to Malachi 3:6 (“I change not.”), He would not have done so. Yet, many teach that Jesus Christ did exactly that when He said: “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1-3), and they say that His statement means that Jesus has prepared a place *in heaven* for the New Testament saints. What a gross misinterpretation of God’s plain truth!

The Apostle Paul was wonderfully clear on this point. In Romans 4:13, he wrote: “For the promise that he should inherit the earth was not to Abraham *or to his seed* through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (emphases added). In Galatians 3:16 Paul wrote: “The promises were made to Abraham and his *seed*.” Paul argued that the term “seed” is singular and refers to Jesus Christ. By application under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was pointing out that all that was promised to Abraham would become the inheritance of Jesus Christ – that is, He would inherit it by *unchangeable divine promise and oath*. Has He prepared it as an abode for any of the saints *yet*? No...but the plans are in place and are ready for execution when it is time for them to be set into motion (Ephesians 1:9, 10).

Paul added the clincher in verse 29: “If you belong to Christ, then *you* are Abraham’s seed and an heir according to the promise.” If you belong to Christ, then “Christ” will be formed in you (Colossians 1:27). In that case, wrote Paul, you will be the children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16, 17). You will inherit the *earth* with Him! You can be *absolutely, positively* sure of that and use it as an anchor for your faith. Is God’s word *truth or lie*? Read John 17:17 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

Reigning on the Earth

Ask yourself this most important question: Why should God go to the trouble of *revealing* His truth if people are going to simply *ignore* it? This is the case with two important prophecies in the

book of *Revelation*. In Revelation 5:10, Christ revealed to the Apostle John that the saints of God are going to become "...kings and priests: and...reign **on the earth**" (emphases added). In Revelation 11:15, Christ proclaimed that the last trumpet that announces the second coming of Christ will signal a momentous occasion. Millions of people sing about this in Handel's *Messiah* every year and claim to believe it: "...There were great voices in heaven, saying, **The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ;** and he shall reign for ever and ever" (emphases added). What about Matthew 6:10: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven"? Dare we simply spiritualize these plain statements away and claim that they mean something other than what is prophesied?

What is the revelation? The saints of God will become kings and priests for the express purpose of reigning with Christ in His kingdom **on the earth**. Revelation 20:4, 6 reveals that the length of this reign will be at least 1,000 years. The context of all of this goes far beyond the mere reign of Christ in the hearts of the believers.

Yet, some dare to say that belief in this fundamental revelation from Christ is not a test of *orthodoxy* (that is, conforming to an official formulation of truth) and that Jesus sought to guard against the idea of an **earthly** territorial kingdom. Well, we should be warned that acceptance of **God's** revealed truth **is** a test of orthodoxy (I John 2:3-6; 1 Timothy 3:15). It is not a light thing to have the truth revealed to you and then ignore it. Believing and acting upon **God's truth** is a fundamental trait of the true disciple of Christ. We dare not ignore His plain truth.

Ask yourself why God should go to the trouble of revealing such great understanding of His plan and will if so-called "Christians" are going to ignore it. These are things that the Old Testament prophets and angels longed to understand (Matthew 13:17; 1 Peter 1:10-12)!

Fundamental Prophecies about the Earthly Kingdom

If two righteous witnesses establish the truth of a matter (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16), then there is no need to get really exhaustive about the numerous references to the earthly territorial kingdom of God. To keep this from being an “Old Testament” -vs- “New Testament” fight, we’ll explore references from both.

The prophet Daniel is a reliable witness in this regard. Called upon to interpret a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel told him that “...the great God has shown the king what is going to happen in the future. It is a true dream and an exact interpretation” (Daniel 2:45). Is Daniel exaggerating the importance of his role as a God-inspired interpreter? Hardly. He had warned Nebuchadnezzar ahead of time that “...there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He is making known to the king Nebuchadnezzar **what shall be in the latter days**” (v. 28; emphases added). Now, notice his interpretation of this dream. Please remember that this scripture was inspired by God as a witness of His plan and will.

Daniel described the significance of the various parts of the great, bright statue and pointed out that they represent succeeding, world-ruling *human-led* kingdoms. Even though they would degenerate from “gold” to “iron mixed with miry clay,” they would, in fact, control the world and its inhabitants right up to the time when the God of heaven will set up His own kingdom (v. 44). This is the place where you must pay close attention to the revelation of God to Daniel.

Notice Daniel’s inspired description of God’s kingdom: “...it will ***shatter*** and ***absorb*** all the previous kingdoms” (v. 44b; *The Jerusalem Bible*, 1971; emphases added). After this great event occurs, there will never again be another *human-led* kingdom set up after God’s kingdom is established. The idea is simple: God will come against the kingdoms of this world, shatter them, and establish His own holy rule on the face of the earth. This is God’s ***revealed*** plan.

In Daniel 7 there is another dream that involves successive *human-led* governments. The inspired interpretation given to Daniel is no less a witness than the interpretation of the dream in Daniel 2. It is, for all practical purposes, a different dream that leads to the same conclusion. This time the dream involves different beasts that represent the succeeding *human-led* kingdoms. Notice Daniel's interpretation.

The various thrones will be overthrown (v. 9), and God will sit in judgment (v. 10). The beast will be destroyed (v. 11), and those who were his fellows will have their power taken away and wait for their judgment to come (v. 12). Christ will appear before God the Father and will be crowned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to rule over "...all people, nations, and languages...his dominion...shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed" (vv. 13, 14). Where does it reveal the location of this kingdom? Will it be in heaven – or, on earth?

When Daniel received the interpretation of this dream from God, he was told that the saints of God will "...take the kingdom and possess it for ever and ever" (v. 18). As a matter of fact, the fourth beast will make war with the saints and prevail against them until the Ancient of Days comes and gives them power to take the kingdom and to execute judgment over it (vv. 19-22). Then, Daniel is shown that "...the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom ***under the whole heaven***, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (v. 27). Pay attention to the preposition ***under***.

The New Testament counterpart to this is found in various scriptures, not the least of which is Matthew 25:31-46. This reveals that Jesus Christ will come and sit in judgment over the nations of the earth. He will gather them before Him and start a sorting process that identifies those who are His and those who are not. This is a compressed description, so we must not assume that all of this is accomplished in one fell swoop of time. After all, He is go-

ing to reign for a thousand years! Zechariah 14 shows some of the process a bit more clearly.

The Lord returns to the Mount of Olives (see Acts 1:11, 12) to fight against the nations of this world system. When He conquers them, He will be ***King over all the earth*** (Zechariah 14:9). Verse 16 reveals that He will have certain expectations of "...every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem...." These ***human beings*** who survive that great, final war will be judged according to how they accept the worship requirements set forth in the government of God's kingdom (vv. 16-19). First Corinthians 15:24-28 shows that Christ will thus reign until He has conquered all of God's enemies, even death. This, as stated above, will not be something that is accomplished in one fell swoop of divine wrath and judgment. It will take time. At the end of the 1,000 years, He will turn over the kingdom to God the Father.

Most of this should make clear the interpretation of Revelation 11:15. When you read the prophetic accounts in the chapters that follow, you see a definite pattern that is in lockstep with the revelations to Daniel. Satan is cast out of heaven and immediately influences the actions of the beast to make war with the saints. He prevails for three and one-half prophetic years (ch. 12, 13). Christ then sets up the mechanism whereby He can "harvest" out the saints before He comes to pour out His wrath upon the Whore "Babylon" (ch. 14-18). The last-hour supporters of the beast join him to make war with Jesus Christ (17:12-18).

In Revelation 19, we see that the saints will have been changed from flesh to spirit (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). One of the most telling verses in this chapter is verse 11: "...in righteousness he judges and makes war." If your only objective were to come back and take the "saved" to heaven, why would you come to *judge* and *make war*? If you understand what has been said up to this point, you would understand that the idea is ***to conquer and rule over the nations of this earth***. How do you do that if you simply beat them up and take off back to heaven for eterni-

ty? In reality, the warfare would serve no practical purpose – especially if you have the power to change the “saved” from dust or flesh to spirit and fly away to heaven. Please do not think that He would wage war just to leave the earth to the Jews or the Old Testament saints!

Another telling verse is verse 15: “And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He shall smite the **nations**; and He shall **rule them** [that is, the nations of this world] with a rod of iron: and He treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” The fundamental message of God to the rulers of this present world system – human and spirit – is that a day of conquest is looming large on the horizon. Spiritualizing this away does not change it. Not accepting this belief as a test of orthodoxy does not change it. There is no human or spirit power that can or will stop it. To deny the truth of this teaching is to pervert the plain revelation of God through His prophets and His Christ!

Finally, Revelation 20 teaches us that Satan will be confined in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years while Christ and the saints rule over the kingdom that will never again revert back to human dominion. It is very plainly revealed that the saints will sit as priests and kings under Jesus Christ and will judge the inhabitants of the earth (vv. 4, 6; see also 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). It should not surprise you, at this point, to learn that they will rule over flesh-and-blood subjects. Read again all of the references so you can fully understand this concept.

There is no better description of how God’s kingdom will work as that which is given by the prophet Isaiah. This description is set “...*in the last days...*” (Isaiah 2:2; emphases added). Daniel’s description in Daniel 2 was also for the last days. God revealed through Isaiah that His kingdom will be set up over all the other governments on the earth, and all nations will stream to it for instruction about God’s way of life. They will not only learn about the laws of personal success, but they will also learn about the religious concepts that God deems to be **truth** and **life**. As Isaiah very

plainly put it: "...he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (v. 3b). This is the fulfillment of that "sharp sword" that will go out of the mouth of the conquering Christ (Revelation 19:15). This is the means by which He will separate the "sheep" from the "goats."

Notice, too, that He will "...judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people..." (v. 4). Does it strike you as being a bit strange that not everyone will simply fall in line and be obedient? This is why the judgment is not finished in a fell swoop fashion. The objective of the kingdom's government is to bring these people to salvation, not to destroy them (John 3:17). They must undergo a spiritual change in order to be spiritually conquered by Christ. He must rid them of everything that causes them to war against themselves and one another.

The redeemed saints are joint-heirs in this kingdom, so it is in their hearts and minds to assist Christ in this work as priests and kings and judges. When the job is successful, then "...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn of war any more" (v. 4b). How can Isaiah use such language if there is no literal, earthly kingdom? And...if True Christians are to be where He is (John 14:3), how shall they be in *heaven* while He is ruling on the earth? There would be something wrong with that picture!

The Answer to a Prayer

How fervently do you desire God's response to your prayers? How eagerly do you accept instruction from Christ about the things for which you should pray? There is a prayer model that Christ gave to His disciple that should be very instructive to us regarding God's soon-coming kingdom.

Matthew 6:10 is the specific reference: “[May] your kingdom come [so that] your will [can] be done in earth as it is in heaven.” In light of what we have seen in this study, I do not feel that this paraphrase is a perversion of the intention of Christ in giving us this model. It is not essentially different from this: “[May] your kingdom come; [may] your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In light of the prophetic revelations we have seen, why shouldn’t we pray for such a kingdom to come and conquer the misguided attempts of human governments to rule over this earth? God’s will certainly has not been done, nor is it presently being done on this earth by the governments of mankind! Surely the rulership of Jesus Christ is more highly desirable than what we have seen in our day or any other in the long history of mankind!

How earnestly do you desire the government of God to be established not only in your personal life, but also the lives of the mass of humanity all over the earth? Is it worth it to you to have faith in God’s true revelation? Or, would you rather continue to believe and perpetuate the teachings of **men** as though they are the doctrines of God? Your decision can make you either a “sheep” or a “goat.”

- Nine -

The Restitution of All Things

In Acts 3, the Apostles Peter and John had just healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate in the Temple and astounded many of the people who had personally known, or known about, the man since he was born. Peter let them know very quickly that this was done through Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, Peter said: "...The faith that is made possible by Him has given this man perfect healing in your presence" (v. 16b). Then he told them to repent of their sins so that they could have them "...blotted out when the *times of refreshing* come from the presence of the Lord, Whom the heaven must receive until the *times of restitution of all things...*" (v. 21; emphases added). This is very interesting language if for no other reason than the fact that Peter said that God has "...spoken [of it] by the mouth of His prophets *since the world began*" (v. 21; emphases added).

No doubt, this was the message of the Lord God in the Garden of Eden when things went astray. No doubt, this was part and parcel to the prophecy about the woman's "seed" that would deal with the serpent...and part of the sacrifice He made to cover their sins. Why would this be necessary?

The Apostle Paul discussed this in Romans 8:19-23. The problem is simple: God subjected the creation to *frustration* and *decadence*. As William Barclay puts it in his translation: "For the cre-

ated world has been subjected to chaos, not because of its own choice, but through Him who passed the sentence of such subjugation upon it, and yet it still has the hope that the created world also will be liberated from this slavery to decay and will be brought to the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (p. 112). Notice that the earth was *subjected to chaos* and put into *slavery to decay*. Notice also that it will be *liberated* from it when the sons of God are revealed. When and why did God do this? When will He liberate it?

The Lord God did it because of the sin of Adam and Eve. The frustration and decadence were different from God’s cursing of the ground as an object lesson: “...*Cursed* is the ground because of you. All the days of your life you will eat of it through painful toil. It will produce thorns and thistles...” (Genesis 3:17-19; emphasis added). God lifted the curse of the ground after the flood (see Genesis 8:21), but the creation remained subject to frustration and decadence. Apparently, it is part of the “death” sentence.

Even in the threat of such chaos and degeneration, God, by the mouth of His prophets, spoke of the ***hope of the restitution of all things***. He never intended for the earth to waste away to nothing or to be destroyed. He intended for it to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18) and for it to be a splendidly beautiful abode for mankind. He has let us know throughout the ages through His prophets that it shall be revived and made alive again when He reveals His born-again Children (Romans 8:19-23).

A Prelude to Utopia

Pay attention to the sequence of events listed in the book of Revelation. The Lamb begins to open the ***seven seals*** of the scroll in chapter 6. The first four seals represent what is commonly called “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”: (1) false Christs; (2) wars upon the earth; (3) drought and famine; and (4) pestilence and death. The fifth represents the martyrdom of the saints, and

the sixth foretells heavenly signs that precede the return of Christ. By the time these six seals have been opened, the earth will have suffered many major catastrophes for several centuries. These catastrophes will pale into insignificance when compared to what comes with the opening of the seventh seal.

The seventh seal represents the pouring out of **seven trumpet plagues** (Revelation 8-11). They consist of: (1) hail and fire mixed with blood – one-third of the trees and grass is burned up; (2) a mountain of fire is cast into the sea and it turns to blood – one-third of all sea life and one-third of all ships are destroyed; (3) a star called Wormwood falls into the fresh water supply – many are killed by the bitter waters; (4) a third part of the sun, moon, and stars is darkened; (5) for five months locusts and scorpions torment those without God's holy spirit; (6) two hundred million soldiers are turned loose – one-third of the earth's population is killed (that is approximately two **billion** people at present). Then come the seventh trumpet and the return of Christ. Prior to this time, there will have been the rule of the Beast and False Prophet during the Tribulation Period (see Revelation 12-14) and all of the death that is associated with that.

Just as the seven trumpet plagues were the entirety of the seventh seal, so are the seven bowl plagues the entirety of the seventh trumpet. These plagues coincide with the return of Jesus Christ. They mark the **completion** of the wrath of God (Revelation 15:1). At the return of Jesus Christ, there is going to be considerable war waged (see Revelation 15-19). Revelation 16 describes the seven bowl plagues that will be poured out upon all of those who follow the Beast: (1) noisome and grievous sores; (2) the sea is turned to blood – every living thing in it dies; (3) fresh waters are turned to blood because of the shedding of the blood of the Saints; (4) the sun scorches men with great heat; (5) darkness envelops the unrepentant and brings great pain; (6) the river Euphrates dries up – leading to the great battle at Jerusalem (see Zechariah 14).

riah 14; Revelation 17 and 19); (7) a mighty earthquake destroys Babylon – followed by a great hail storm.

Imagine the total carnage that is going to occur before Jesus Christ and the Saints are finished! To get some idea by comparison, consider this example: after the 1,000 year Kingdom period, it will take seven months to bury the dead after the battle with Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 39:11; Revelation 20:7-9). The battle of Revelation 17-19 will be greater carnage than that. Carrion birds will feast on their flesh for a while (Revelation 19:17-21), but there is no mention of burial details for this carnage. I'm sure, however, that there will be some. Some have speculated that there will only be about one-tenth of the earth's population left alive on the earth to inhabit the Kingdom – that's approximately six hundred million people! I know of no place in the scripture where this is stated. I think the speculation is based on the tithe principle. Whatever the number, it will be significantly fewer than it presently is. What a way to begin the process of restitution and refreshing! What a prelude to Utopia! It will definitely capture the attention of the earth's inhabitants as they emerge from this culmination of the wrath of God.

A Time for Change

Someone once said that prophecy is not about *events*; it is about *conditions*. Prophecy contains strong moral judgments about that which must be changed. It is not about charts and graphs and dates and times. If that is the case – and I have no reason to believe that it is *not* the case – then God's strong moral judgment of mankind is going to cost mankind a great price. The aftermath of such events is going to mark a time for great change, but, in spite of the carnage, that change will result in a time of great healing and revitalization. This change will be inaugurated at the return of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in the Kingdom of God (John14:2-4), the Apostle Thomas asked: “We do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?” (v. 5). Jesus’ reply seems a bit cryptic: “*...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except by Me*” (v. 6; emphases added). However, this is not as cryptic as it might at first appear – if you understand what Jesus means when He says that He is *the Way*.

When Paul was breathing fire and threats against the young Church, he wanted letters giving him permission to go into the synagogues and find any who were “...of *The Way*...” (Acts 9:2; emphases added). This was one of the earliest names given to the Christian movement. Acts 19:9, 23 also speaks of “*that way*,” indicating the spiritual path traveled by early Christians as they carried out the Great commission given by Jesus Christ to teach and preach the things He had revealed to them (Matthew 28:19, 20). The only avenue by which that can be accomplished is through knowledge of the truth of God and the life-style it takes to accomplish it. The time of change will begin in earnest when Jesus Christ has in place the governmental body He needs to teach and enforce “*The Way*” upon the inhabitants of the earth. *The Way*, simply put, is the manifestation of the heart, mind, and will of God Himself.

Simple Cause/Effect at Work

One of the easiest ways to understand this concept is to look at what the Lord God did with Israel – the laws He gave them, the promises He made, and the covenant He concluded with them. The Apostle Paul made two great comments in I Corinthians 10 about this relationship between the Lord God and Israel: “...For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and *that Rock was Christ*....Now these things were our *examples*, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted....Now all these

things happened to them for *types*: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (vv. 4, 6, 11; emphases added).

Read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The overwhelming message in both places is simple: *obedience* is of primary importance to the Lord God. I Samuel 15:22, 23 says: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." Notice all the times He says "If...then...." These are examples and types for us today.

The point of Isaiah 58 is that Jacob needs to understand the nature of and the price for his rebellion: "For day after day they seek Me out as if they are eager to know My ways, as if they always do righteously and do not forsake My commands. They ask Me for justice and seem eager for Me to be near them" (v. 2). Then He points out how they are rebellious and what to do to correct that. He concludes by telling them that when they have done as they are told, "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and He will say: Here am I" (v. 9).

The same idea is given in Zechariah 14:16-19. When the Lord God has conquered the nations that have come up to fight against Jerusalem, those who survive that encounter will have certain expectations laid out for them. One of the most prominent in this scripture is that they will be expected to go up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. If they do not go, there is an automatic consequence for their rebellion: ***God does not give them rain.*** If they continue not to go, ***then He not only withholds the rain, He punishes them with a plague for their continued rebellion.***

Malachi 3 mirrors this same cause/effect relationship that is at work here. After explaining how He will execute judgment when He comes, He points to one simple test: tithing. "Test me in this," He says. "And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for

it” (v. 10). Then notice all the things that will result from this simple test! Those who fear the Lord and obey Him will become His peculiar treasure (vv. 16, 17), “And you will again see the distinction between the obedient and the disobedient, the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not” (v. 18).

In John 4:23, 24, Jesus said: “...A time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers He seeks. God is a spirit, and His worshipers **must** worship Him in spirit and in truth.” As mankind begins to obey God in spirit and in truth, He will open the fountains of blessings. The people will see the stark contrast between two ways of life and will decide that God’s is preferable to man’s. This will cause them to allow themselves to be re-educated. Prophecy tells us that this will happen. In our own hearts and minds, we should realize that being able to put this down in a chart and timetable is not what God intended when He made the prophecy available to us. What He wants us to realize is that He intends for change to take place – and we must be willing to change or we will perish from existence. The net effect of this will be a return to a Garden of Eden state (see Ezekiel 36:33-36 and Isaiah 51:3).

Toward a Perfect Government

When God *really* sets His hand to save mankind, it will be accomplished with a **perfect government** that will not only bring all things into *subjection* to Him, but will set about *re-educating* the world (compare Isaiah 2:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). What duties will the saints, who will have received eternal life at the second coming of Jesus Christ, have after they assist Him in subduing the international armies attacking Jerusalem (see Zechariah 14; Daniel 7:21, 22, 26, 27 and Revelation 19:11-21)?

Contrary to common belief, Christ is going to move toward establishing a perfect government upon the earth – and He will put

the saints into very special positions of leadership in that perfect government. As He told Pilate just before His crucifixion, this government will not be just another in a long series of *man-made* governments that have failed to produce the true well-being and peace God originally intended for His people (see John 18:33-37).

Anyone who wants to rightly divide God's word of truth about this matter must pay close attention to God's word. The saints will sit in seats of power in the government of Jesus Christ as ***judges, priests, and kings***. Nowhere is this made any plainer than Revelation 20:4, 6: "I saw ***thrones*** on which were seated those who had been given authority as ***judges***...and they came to life and ***reigned*** with Christ a thousand years....Blessed and holy are those who are raised to life in the first resurrection because the second death will have no power over them. They will be ***priests*** of God and of Christ and will ***reign*** with Him for a thousand years." The saints will make up the ruling body of judges, priests, and kings under the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 3:21; 5:10). Imagine what an awesome reward those positions will be to the Saints!

This idea goes against the grain of what is commonly taught in Traditional Christianity. However, there is biblical justification for the concept – unlike the non-biblical concept of going to heaven to receive one's eternal reward. The problem is simple: Traditional Christianity has either ignored or chosen to disregard God's plain revelation about how the earth is going to be totally re-educated by His literal, earthly kingdom.

Humans Live on the Earth *after* the Return of Jesus Christ!

Contrary to the teachings of Traditional Christianity, a ***human*** population will live on the earth after the return of Jesus Christ. They will not have been killed by the Tribulation, the Seven Trumpet Plagues, or the Seven Bowl Plagues (the completion of the wrath of God; Revelation 15:1). They will be the *remaining* popu-

lation of “...the *survivors* from ***all the nations*** that attacked Jerusalem...” in the final conflict against Jesus Christ and the saints (Zechariah 14:16; emphases added). How does that work?

There are several scriptural references that must be read in order to see the logic behind the assertion. Probably the most impressive is Revelation 20:3: “[The angel threw Satan] into the bottomless pit and sealed it up over him in order to ***keep him from deceiving the nations anymore*** until the thousand years are passed. ***After the thousand years are passed***, he must be released for a short time” (emphases added). Who are these ***nations*** needing protection from Satan for 1,000 years? Surely they are not the ***saints*** who will have been changed from flesh to spirit at the return of Christ (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)! There would be no need to guard them from Satan. At the end of the thousand years, Satan is loosed and deceives “***...the nations at the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog...***” (v. 8; emphases added). The fact that they will be subsequently destroyed by fire from God demonstrates that they are not spirit beings who are changed at the second coming of Jesus Christ. They are flesh-and-blood people.

Zechariah 14 describes the return of Christ to conquer the nations that will gather to attack Jerusalem. After that battle, Christ will be “... king over the entire earth” (v. 9). Notice in verse 16 how He will treat the ***survivors*** who do not wish to conform to His teachings: He will inflict drought and plague upon them. Surely, you can see that He is not punishing those who were changed from flesh to spirit at His return! He is dealing with flesh-and-blood humans who continue to be recalcitrant. He and the saints are going to deal with such like humans for the entire thousand year period! And these ***survivors*** are not only the Jews; they are also from the ***nations*** who will attack Jerusalem.

In Isaiah 65, the Lord God says that He will re-create Jerusalem. Notice the context of His promise: ‘Never again will there be an infant that ***lives only a few days***, or an old man who does not live to a ripe age; ***anyone who dies at 100 years old will be***

thought to be a mere youth; anyone who dies younger than 100 years old will be considered accursed’ (v. 20; emphases added).

This plainly demonstrates the idea that human beings will survive the second coming of Jesus Christ and will continue to reproduce during His reign. We know that the work of Christ and the saints during the Kingdom Period is not complete at this point because, even though people live longer, they still die (see 1 Corinthians 15:26). Although this scripture deals specifically with all of Israel, the nations of the world will receive similar treatment. Those who adhere to the Dispensational idea that God will send all Christians back to heaven while He fulfills His promises to the “Jews” (a group they don’t even know how to properly identify) are missing a great truth in God’s plan of salvation for mankind.

Finally, notice God’s plans as given in Isaiah 2. The Lord God will set up His Temple as the main governmental structure above all the nations of the world – Israelite and Gentile alike. Isaiah proclaims: “**All nations** will stream to it” (v. 2; emphases added). These are the same *human* nations we have already discussed. Why will they go to Jerusalem to the Temple of the Lord? There are three basic reasons: (a) to be taught the ways of the Lord (v. 3; see also Isaiah 55:8, 9); (b) to settle disputes between nations that still linger during the Kingdom Period (v. 4a); and (c) to destroy the weapons and attitudes that make war possible (v. 4b). This is the manner in which Christ will wield the sharp, two-edged sword that is to come out of His mouth as He rules the nations with a rod of iron (see Revelation 19:15). The saints will be given authority to participate with Christ in this government as *judges, priests, and kings* (see Revelation 20:4, 6). This should adequately demonstrate that Christ and the saints will rule over flesh-and-blood humans during the Kingdom Period. This is not what is typically taught by Traditional Christianity. ***But this is the message of the True Gospel of Christ – the good news about the Kingdom of God!***

Yet, some have the idea that God has been in the process of saving face since the episode in the Garden of Eden. Is that true? No. Why? Even though God created immutable laws that govern all the created orders in the universe, man was made a creature that can *choose* the way of life he will follow. According to Proverbs 14:12, man is presented with a tricky proposition to deal with because there are some things that appear to be right and proper, but they lead to *death* – and this is an *ultimate death*, not the one which all of mankind will experience (see Hebrews 9:27). What has man done with this great freedom of choice given to him by God? “We have all gone astray like a bunch of sheep – everyone turning to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). As man has turned to his own way, he has perpetuated – generation after generation, rightly, wrongly or indifferently – a misguided, confused, deceived, and chaotic world. It is a world filled with strife, fear, ignorance, deception, injustice, crime, suffering, anguish, woe, and death! ***How shall we ever be free of these curses?*** We cannot do it by continuing to follow the wisdom of this world because it is *foolishness* with God (1 Corinthians 3:19).

God proclaimed through the prophet Hosea: “My people are *destroyed* for lack of [true] knowledge” (Hosea 4:6; emphases added). This is not a lack of knowledge itself; it deals more with a lack of even the most rudimentary concept of “God” in the broadest sense of the term. It indicates that man needs a complete change in thinking – a re-education that is enforced by the truth that is so abundantly available from God’s own mind. It is most difficult to get that point across to those who “[have] a form of godliness, but...[are] ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:5, 7).

True education, then, must be different from the typical education found in the various “educational” institutions of this world system. There is a “way” of life and knowledge that is considered to be the path of true education (Acts 19:9, 23); however, the world does not agree that it is the way to true education (Acts 24:14).

Any who pursue God's true way of life are going to go through a process of re-education in which they will ***un-learn*** the false concepts of this world and learn the true values of God that are so much higher in quality (Isaiah 55:7-9). At one time or another, we will all have to come before God and make the same admission as that recorded in Jeremiah 16:19: "O Lord, my strength and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto you from the ends of the earth, and shall say, ***Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things that are not profitable***" (emphases added). ***True education*** is not the product of a lie or of a deception. God will expect all of us to turn from the wrong concepts to the truth (see Isaiah 55:7 and John 4:23, 24). ***True education*** will be derived from God's own word (see John 17:17). ***True education*** is a matter of ***renewing*** the mind with sound knowledge that is provided by God through His Spirit (see John 16:7-15; Romans 12:1, 2). Only by having your mind transformed in that way – and making that transformation the permanent pattern of life – will you ever be free from the world's deadly influence (see John 8:31, 32).

The Objective of Re-Education

As Paul said, renewing the mind is the prime objective. There is not an aspect of life that is not to be affected by this renewal. Paul told the Corinthians: "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God." Both Paul and Peter said that we should have the same mind that is in Jesus Christ and cease from following the fleshly lusts of men and submit ourselves to the will of God (see Philippians 2:5-13 and 1 Peter 4:1-5). Clearly, these are some very broad objectives.

If we are to be ***perfect*** as God is perfect, that is, having a morality that is fully developed according to the purpose of God, then God is demanding that our spiritual character must drastically change to conform to His. This is the job He has presently given

to His ministry as an *initial phase* of the overall process: to edify His Church – that is, to educate and build up – *until* we come to that perfection and unity (Ephesians 4:11-16). That type of perfection will not be reached until we are changed from flesh to spirit at the coming of Jesus Christ. We must also be *sound-minded* (2 Timothy 1:7), which includes being morally straight, having good judgment about things in life, possessing moderation, maintaining self-control, and being prudent and self-disciplined. Could we accomplish such things on God's level if God's way did not regulate our lives? Hardly!

Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 says: "Let us understand the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments because *this is what constitutes the whole man*. For God shall bring *every work* into judgment, which also includes every secret thing – whether it is good or evil" (emphases added). When you sit and contemplate such an idea, that is quite a bit to have to change so that it will be in conformity with God's will and purpose! The fact that the original Hebrew wording says that such obedience constitutes the *whole man* means that total obedience to God will take a total re-education to produce a fully-developed, balanced, and well-rounded individual suited for life in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ promised us perpetual joy if we would yield to His way of life. We will understand His love as we are obedient to His commandments (John 15:10-12). He has a great desire that we prosper and have a healthy life (3 John 2) – and He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). The secret to achieving these objectives is to obey Him in all things – even in His laws that regulate life and health, personal relationships, and our relationship with God. These are the things that will be universally taught during the Kingdom period. The Firstfruits, who will have demonstrated their willingness to submit to God's way before the Kingdom actually comes, will sit with Jesus on His throne and help to make this re-education possible.

Proper Educational Administration

The *educational system* of any given society is the means by which its knowledge, values, and beliefs are controlled and perpetuated from one generation to the next. It is, in fact, the primary molder of society itself. *Administration* presupposes two basic elements: *authority* and *law*. If Jesus Christ is going to administer the re-education of the world, He will have to have a system by which a body of knowledge, values, and beliefs is communicated to the populace of the Kingdom, as well as the authority and the law to support His right to do so. All others who serve with Him to administer the educational system will have to be similarly empowered.

It would be logical to assume that the only reason that Jesus Christ would replace all of the governments of the world is because, in spite of their best intentions, they have not really known how to govern properly or to effectively educate their people – stamping out crime, injustice, disease, and poverty. There are too many shortcomings in all forms of *human* government.

Isaiah's description of Judah's punishment was a microcosmic example of this: "...They are all alienated [from Me]. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will only revolt more and more *because the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint*" (Isaiah 1:5; emphases added). There seems to come a time when, even with God, some other means for getting the point across must be used. Having allowed mankind the opportunity to organize their own governments has been fruitless. Mankind has gone his own way and alienated himself from God to the point that God sees no sense in continuing in the path He has allowed to exist. Mankind has proved his utter inability to form godly government and to conduct himself in a godly manner.

The question we need to ask in anticipation of the establishment of the Kingdom of God under the rulership of Jesus Christ is simple: ***How will the educational system be administered in order***

to greatly benefit all of mankind and change this trend of alienation?

There is much said in scripture about the authority that has been given to Jesus Christ so He can reign and rule properly. Long before He was born, prophecy was given to Isaiah that proclaimed many of the particulars: "...The government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord will perform this" (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Jesus announced to His disciples prior to ascending to the right hand of God the Father: "**All power** is given to me **in heaven** and **in earth**" (Matthew 28:18; emphases added). The Apostle Paul was inspired of God to write: "...God has also **highly exalted** Him, and given Him a name **which is above every name**: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things **in heaven**, and things **in the earth**, and things **under the earth**; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11; emphases added). The Apostle John was inspired to write: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). It should be easy to see that God the Father has vested in Jesus Christ great power and authority to install a system of government unparalleled in the history of humankind. The point is simple: **If mankind cannot or will not adequately govern or educate themselves, then they must look to the Almighty Creator to do it for them!**

The Twelve Apostles were told by Jesus Christ that they would sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). There is intended here, apparently, a revelation of a type of strata to the government of Jesus Christ. It appears, if Jesus is sitting on the throne of David (of course, David will have his

own throne – see Ezekiel 34:23; 37:22-24; Hosea 3:5), that the Twelve Apostles will be in a tier of rulership under Jesus Christ and David.

Notice also that Jesus refers to *appointed positions* in the parables of the talents (see Matthew 25:21, 23 and Luke 19:17, 19). As the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He will use His Divine Right to appoint the Lords, Kings, Priests, and Judges that will reign under Him. This was His firm commitment to those who “...overcome and keep My works to the end, ***to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron***” (Revelation 2:26; see also Revelation 20:4, 6; emphases added). Therefore, they will not be voted into office, take it by force of arms, or be accountable to the people for their authority to administer the educational system of the Kingdom. The Christ and His Saints will be in complete charge of the government of the Kingdom – and the people will learn to obey their Divine Rulers during the Millennium.

“In My Father’s House Are Many Offices...”

Jesus Christ will occupy at least two powerful offices in the Kingdom: King and Lord. What is the difference between them as far as their functions are concerned? The Greek word for *King* is *basileus*, which means *the possessor of the highest power*, i.e., the mighty God. He is to be the undisputed ruler of the Kingdom – the governing body. The Greek word for *Lord* is *kurios* – the undisputed master. In this case, the name is linked to His Old Testament designation of *Yahweh Elohim*, i.e., the saving, or redeeming, God. In other words, Jesus Christ will be the King who rules over the rulers of the Kingdom, as well as the Saving God in charge of those responsible (that is, the Saints) for redeeming humanity from the depths of sin and shame to which they have fallen. It is also linked to I Corinthians 6:19, 20: “...You are not your own

...for you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and your spirit, which are God's."

In this way, Jesus Christ will unite the functions of both Church and State in order to make His rulership more relevant to the needs of mankind at that time. As a Kingdom of Priests (Revelation 5:10), the Saints will have to receive authority from Jesus Christ to carry out the re-education of the populace. Whether we realize it or not, God is presently in the process of calling out individuals who will have the opportunity to reign and rule with Jesus Christ in that government (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

The great responsibility of being a priest under Jesus Christ is not to be taken lightly. Part of our present training is to prepare us for this glorious task. We must realize that "...The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and [the people] should seek the law at [the priest's] mouth: for [the priest] is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 2:7). Serving as ministers, teachers, and judges, Christ and the Saints will re-educate every nation because they will have the proper program for it, as well as the authority to carry it out – even if the populace resists it (see Zechariah 14:16-19). This represents great power to overcome any type of opposition!

Isaiah 30:20, 21 also explains another type of enforcement technique that will insure the success of the re-education program: "And though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but your eyes will see your teachers. Whether you turn right or left, your ears will hear these words behind you, 'This is the way, follow it.'" The Saints will have the ability to appear right on the scene at any time in order to prevent the populace from going astray. This is tough crime prevention, but it will yield the fruit of peace and plenty for all of the inhabitants of the Kingdom.

If you understand the sense of all of this responsibility, then you should easily see that there will be many offices to fill in this

very special Kingdom. Can you sincerely pray for that Kingdom to come?

“The Law Shall Go out of Zion”

It might take some getting used to on the parts of the populace of the Kingdom, but God’s law will go out of Zion to the entire world (Isaiah 2:3). There might be some resistance at first, but eventually they will understand the greatness of the message contained therein and realize that it is given for their ultimate salvation. Then, they will begin to see eye to eye with the Lord and His Saints (Isaiah 52:7, 8). Isaiah 11 says that the Lord – and, presumably, those who are His Teachers – will argue for equity for the meek of the earth. He will make every attempt to teach and re-educate, with the demand that righteousness will prevail on the earth to the degree that there will be no hurt nor harm in all the earth – even among the animal kingdom (vv. 4-9). The end of verse 9 says: “...For the **whole earth** shall be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Everyone will learn the fullness of God’s truth. They will be without excuse if they should decide to refuse to abide by it.

Even though Isaiah (59:20, 21) and Ezekiel (36:26) were speaking specifically of Israel, their prophecies give us an idea about how Christ will accomplish this in the entire world. They will receive a ***new attitude or spirit through the work of the Holy Spirit of God.*** This will be a time when Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled to the utmost: “It shall come to pass afterward [that is, after He and the Saints have conquered all of the nations of the world], that I will pour out my spirit upon ***all flesh;*** and your sons and daughters shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28, 29; emphases added). This outpouring of the Spirit of God will greatly enhance the ability of Christ and His

Saints to do the work they have ahead of them during the 1,000-year Kingdom.

It is difficult to explain the full meaning of the expression “...beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks...” (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3), but it involves a process of learning that is going to benefit mankind greatly. Think of the creative genius that God has placed in mankind. Once his mind is rid of all the carnality and the influence of Satan, his inventive genius will, no doubt, soar to heights heretofore unknown. All of it will be put to peaceful, beneficial use. ***Nothing*** will be used for the purpose of war in any shape, size, or description.

Here’s a great promise: “I am the Lord your God who teaches you to profit” (Isaiah 48:17). Nations will be taught the economic rules for ***honest*** prosperity. This will not be prosperity that comes at the expense of one’s neighbor, either. Isaiah declared: “...When your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (26:9). The time for misunderstanding will be past. The rebellious person, the grumbler, the resentful will all be re-educated to be as concerned for the welfare of their neighbors as they are about themselves.

Another fantastic benefit derived from this government will be the elimination of all handicaps! Isaiah 29:18 and 35:5, 6 show us that there will be a great healing process that goes on in which the deaf, blind, lame, halt, and many, many other infirmities will be totally eliminated. Think about what it will mean for the earth to be rid of all birth defects and all defects that come as a result of accidents and the aging process. No more wheelchairs and crutches! No more special appliances and prostheses! No more Alzheimers, arthritis, rheumatism, neuritis, neuralgia, that aching, burning sensation! No more disease and no more war!

Finally, the earth and the universe shall all be returned to a “Garden of Eden” state: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose....In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in

the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Isaiah 35:1-7; Romans 8:19-22).

Thank God that we have so much to look forward to. The world will learn that obedience to God's laws and submission to His authority will produce prosperity, peace, and happiness for all! It should be plain to us that the basis of ***right education*** is God's law. It is not our enemy. It does not enslave us; rather, it gives us such great freedom that our finite, carnal minds cannot even comprehend it without the help of God's Holy Spirit. Thank God that He will soon give Jesus Christ and His Saints the authority to re-educate the world.

Conclusion

There are voices in the world who claim to represent the interests of Jesus Christ and His will for His followers. They are persistent in their claims that Jesus Christ has no intention of setting up a literal Kingdom on earth to be ruled from Jerusalem. If that is true, why did the Lord God spend so much time revealing that idea to His prophets? Why did He spend so much time revealing to them the absolute benefits of such a kingdom? To deny the voice of the prophets of God from the foundation of the earth is to deny that the voice of God to the ages of mankind has had any significance at all. Why even have records of His word if we can merely deny their true significance? It is less than honest to spiritualize away these most important messages from the Lord God.

This has been a presentation of God's truth. You are now faced with one very important question: *Can you handle it?* I sincerely hope so. May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you seek His Kingdom and His righteousness *first* in all you do (Matthew 6:33).