



*The Seventh Day Christian Assembly
Presents*

There's More to
Salvation

Than Meets the Eye

Larry E. Ford, Pastor

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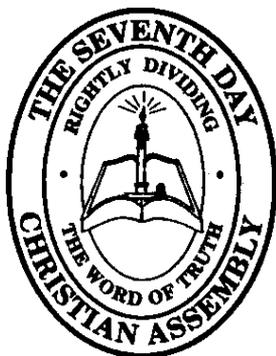
There's More to
Salvation
Than Meets the Eye

by

Larry E. Ford, Pastor
The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc.
4929 Ga. Hwy. 33 South
Doerun, GA 31744
(229) 777-0741
tsdca@hughes.net

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It is published by The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc.
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Straight Talk . . . Plain Truth

Contributions to help defray the costs of publication and mailing
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Salvation does not result merely from a simple confession of faith in Jesus Christ! I know that statement flies in the face of much of what is taught about salvation in mainstream Christianity. But, contrary to popular belief, *salvation* itself comes at a future moment in time as the result of a *process* of education in righteousness. Is it the result of your *religious works*? No, it is the result of God's grace and mercy because an individual has shown himself/herself to be a good and faithful servant by *enduring* in his/her faith in Jesus Christ to the end. *Faith in Jesus Christ* is a *way of life*, not a simple confession of faith made at some moment in time. Let's understand this correctly!

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Introduction

“What Must I do to be Saved?”

(Acts 16:30)

Probably one of the most used scriptures by those who want to get across a message about salvation is the one cited above. One of the most patent answers to that question is the one given within the context of that scripture: “...*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you...*shall be saved*” (emphasis added). The question that confronts us is rather simple – like a verse out of a Patti Page song: *Is that all there is? Really. Is that all there is to being saved?*

Many “Christian” denominations believe in salvation as a gracious gift from God. Not a problem. It is also a generally held belief that this *salvation* experience involves some reward of eternal life after death. Again, not a problem. Most believe that the *real* person is an immortal soul, and that soul will go either to heaven or hell immediately upon death. The *saved*

soul will go to heaven as a reward for simply having confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The *lost* soul will burn forever and ever in a fiery hell created especially to torture them for their unbelief and resulting sins. Well, there is a problem with that part that we must discuss.

It is also generally believed that the person who has made that confession of faith can *never* have that salvation *taken away* from him – nor can he *lose* it – no matter the kind of life he lives after making it. Is that true according to God’s word? Is it *really* that simple? Or, is there more to it than the common John Doe on the street is being told by the ministers of our society? Is there more to it than meets the eye? *God’s* answers to these questions are very *startling*, yet very plain and clear.

Those who believe in salvation upon confession of faith might point you to Romans 4:17 and tell you to notice that God calls those things that *shall be* as if they *already exist*. With that would go the argument that this is a statement about the faithfulness of God to complete the work He has begun in us. Then, they would refer you to Philippians 1:6 where Paul so confidently asserts: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” This is seen as proof positive that the individual who has ever once made that confession of faith in Jesus Christ need never trouble himself over whether or not he is saved. In both cases, they would say that, since God *intends* the end-result to culminate in “salvation,” the individual is *called* “saved.” Also, the proponents of “once-saved-always-saved” would never admit that such individuals could ever do anything to cause themselves to be “lost.” We will see that it would be more appropriate to say that they are “*being saved*” – thus showing that there is a *process* involved.

Many admit that there is a *process* involved in this concept of salvation. That process is said to include the following: (a) *regeneration*: a change of heart which is brought about by the

work of the Holy Spirit as it convicts of sin and leads the individual toward repentance and faith toward God through Jesus Christ; (b) *sanctification*: a process by which the repentant individual is set apart for the fulfilling of God's purpose and *grows* toward moral and spiritual maturity through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; and (c) *glorification*: the culmination of the entire process in which the "corruptible puts on incorruption" – that is, being changed from flesh to spirit at the return of Christ. However, in this explanation they declare that the individual is *saved* from the *beginning* of the process.

Hebrews 11:6 is the focus of the discussion about all of the faithful people who have served God in the past and have qualified for salvation. Paul punctuates this discussion with this undeniable assertion: "Without faith, it is impossible to please God because he that comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Make special notice of the expressions regarding *faith*, *belief*, and *diligence*. All of these are vital ingredients to the salvation process. Ask yourself this: How can one *diligently seek* God in only one moment of time? Doesn't that expression imply a *lifelong process*? How do these things work together to bring one to salvation? It is important to *think* about these things.

Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved by God's grace *through faith* – not by anything we have done to indebted God to us. We cannot, therefore, boast about what we have done to gain salvation. This idea is centered around the experience of Abraham – the father of the faithful. Genesis 15:6 says that Abram "*believed* in the Lord, and the Lord God *counted it to him for righteousness*" (emphasis added). The Lord God made promises to Abram; Abram believed that the Lord God would keep His promises just as He had made them. Did Abram have to *do* something as a *demonstration* that he truly believed the Lord God? Yes! Genesis 12:1-4 shows us that the Lord God *required* Abram to leave his home country and family in order

for the blessings to come upon him. Could Abram have *believed* what God promised – and stayed where he was? Yes. Would that have been *counted to him for righteousness*? No! It was *through Abram’s faith* that he received God’s grace and blessings. *Belief and faith* presuppose that *actions* will follow. Genesis 26:5 says that it was because Abraham *took action* through obedience to God’s charge, commandments, statutes, and laws that God maintained His covenant with him and passed it along to his son Isaac.

This is no different from New Testament instruction in James 2:14-26. I will summarize James’ points: Faith is an *active* demonstration that: (a) an individual puts his trust in God and demonstrates it by the things he does – *works* – and (b) God can trust that individual to be faithful to his “calling” because He sees an active demonstration of it by the things the individual does. I think v. 22 “hits the nail on the head” when James asks: “Don’t you see how faith *wrought* with his works?” (KJV; emphasis added)) The term *wrought* is from the Greek term *sunergeo* – from which we get the term *synergy*. This is the idea that there is *a cooperative action* between *faith* and *works* that causes the *total effect* to be greater than the sum of the two or any effects of operating independently of one another. In v. 19, James says that demons *believe* and *tremble*, but the implication is that they do not have righteous works to bond with their belief. Unless that faith and works model is demonstrated, God’s grace will not be extended. As long as it is demonstrated, God’s grace will be extended. Your belief and faith cannot be a *passive, disconnected* experience.

However, salvation *cannot be earned* by those works. They are simply the *evidence* that the proper faith is held by the individual. *Grace* means that the salvation: (a) cannot be earned, (b) is not deserved – because *sin* has actually disqualified the individual, and (c) cannot be paid back. The creation of mankind was an act of *grace* – just as your birth was. Your sperm

won the race against about 125 million others. Had any other sperm won, *you* would not be here. How do you *earn, deserve, or repay* God for creating such a reproductive system as that? Abraham could not have earned, deserved, or repaid God for choosing him to be the line through whom the Messiah would come. Had Abraham acted differently, he could have been disqualified. God would have had to find another path.

The difference between *faith* and *belief*, with regard to the demons James references, seems, therefore, to be the difference between simply accepting certain knowledge as valid (belief) and accepting the knowledge as valid and *doing* something in relationship to what is known (faith). *The Jerusalem Bible* translates Hebrews 11:1 like this: “Only faith can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen.” So, can you simply *believe in God and/or Christ* and be “saved”? Apparently not. You must *do something* that *demonstrates* that faith. How will God know *your* faithfulness by a single moment in time when you make a profession of faith? Perhaps it is unintentional that those who quote Ephesians 2:8, 9 as a “proof” of God’s “free gift” leave out v. 10: “God has made us what we are, creating us in Christ Jesus *for the good deeds* which are prepared beforehand by God *as our sphere of action*” (*Moffatt*; emphases added). *You do not prove God’s truth by leaving out salient points.*

Paul points out in 2 Timothy 4:3-10 that some who profess faith in Jesus Christ will actually turn away from the truth and believe fables instead. Why? Because they cannot endure *sound doctrine*. Demas was one such individual. Paul’s admonition to the Philippians to *work* out their salvation in fear and trembling is not indicative of an action that takes place merely by a profession of faith at a moment in time (2:12). Also consider those disciples who were confronted with some “hard sayings” by Jesus Christ and turned their backs on Him (John 6:59-66). Don’t be too sure that *you* could not be simi-

larly offended due to your spiritual inability to understand God's truth!

God's True Church has historically taught that salvation is a *process*. It has historically taught that *God* does not deal in a vain hope for repentant mankind because in *God's* mind ***He will be faithful to keep His promises regarding salvation.*** This is where *faith* is paramount. But, God's word also reveals that *mankind* cannot be relied on to always keep *his* word. What is God's attitude in such situations? Let's consider a couple of scriptures that give us the answer to such a question.

Matthew 24 is a pivotal prophecy by Jesus Christ that describes the historical factors that lead up to the Great Tribulation and the subsequent return of Christ. He describes many things that will cause people of true faith to face considerable problems – even alluding to the fact that the last days will have to be cut short for *the sake of the elect* (v. 22). Then He shares His concern that the *very elect* could be deceived by the false Christs and false prophets who come up in those tumultuous days. *Why should that concern Him?*

He has already explained the answer in v. 13: “*He that shall endure unto the end, **the same shall be saved***” (emphasis added). He is not saying this just to *comfort and encourage* those who think they might *die* as a result of these things! We are told in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:7 that the saints are going to suffer physical damage from Satan and the Beast power – even, according to Revelation 20:4, *martyrdom*. *But...what happens if they accept the mark of the Beast?* Jesus opened up the *possibility* that such a thing could happen – and what God's attitude would be toward such people if they did. It will most certainly be a *salvation issue* if they are not faithful *until they are changed from flesh to spirit at the return of Jesus Christ*. Once that change is made (which constitutes *salvation*), it *cannot* be undone – the true “once saved, always saved.” If that's true, then no one is presently *saved*. There's more to it. As

Yogi Berra once said: “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.”

Hebrews 6:4-8 is more specific in its warning. Notice the description given in vv. 4, 5 about *enlightenment, tasting of the heavenly gift, being partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasting the good word of God and the powers of the world to come*. Is it possible for them to **fall away**? Yes. What warning is given to us about doing such a thing? Would it result in *destruction by fire* (v. 8)? Is it apparent in this warning that such a person would have: (a) repented, (b) been baptized, and (c) been given the Holy Spirit? That they had (d) acquired significant understanding of God’s word and plan for humanity? Even acquired (e) spiritual gifts like those described in 1 Corinthians 12? Do you understand that from this passage?

Most churches would claim that such an individual *had never been saved in the first place!* But that answer ignores the plain truth of God’s revelation. In a strange sort of way, they would be correct because, as a matter of fact, *none* of us has yet been **saved**. Most of us, hopefully, will have been *converted* – that is, spiritually regenerated. That and *sanctification* are the only two steps of the process we can take while in the flesh. The step called *glorification* marks the point at which *salvation* actually takes place. *That* is what the Bible reveals to us. However, the most popular teaching would claim that glorification is merely the *end-result* of salvation – not salvation itself. We will continue to sort out what God reveals to us.

This is where the clash of doctrinal positions must result in discussion. This is where we must go to God’s word and ferret out all of the truth God has revealed so that we can walk away from this study being able to worship Him in *spirit* and in *truth* (John 4:23, 24), as well as being freed from the misunderstandings and wrong applications of God’s truth (John 8:31, 32). So, let’s find out why there is more to salvation than meets the eye. If, indeed, you want to believe and act upon God’s unmitigated truth.

– One –

What is *Conversion*?

(What Some Call *Regeneration*)

Study the following scriptures and compare the *common* message in them: (a) “The soul [Hebrew = *nephesh* – living, breathing being] that sins, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20); (b) “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23); and (c) “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). You would be correct if you noted that they all have to do with *sin and death*. Now, in what three ways are they *different* from what is commonly taught? You would be correct if you noted that: (a) *soul* is defined as a *living, breathing being* that can *die*; (b) all humans (*souls*) have sinned; and (c) all sinful humans (*souls*) are going to die unless they receive the *gift* of God through Jesus Christ: *eternal life*. Why should I ask you to pay attention to this?

This is a bare minimum outline of the realizations a person must go through when he wants to go from certain death to eternal life. John 3:18 says that all who have not believed in the name of Jesus Christ are *already condemned*. Unfortunately, that includes infants who die before they reach what is called the “age of accountability” (I will explain that in a later context – so do not let that thought bother you at this point). It would be natural, then, for the question to arise: “Since I’m *guilty*, and *eternal death* is the sentence, how do I get out of this mess? What must I do to be *saved*?” God’s word comes back positively and full of hope: “You must seek the Eternal God while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts...*for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways*, says the Eternal God” (Isaiah 55:6-8; emphasis added). And, “You must repent, and every one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Make note of the “guts” of these two scriptures. The Lord God revealed to Isaiah that *we must abandon our thoughts and ways in favor of His*. This is what Peter calls *repentance*. Belief and budding faith should lead to *repentance*. Repentance should lead to *baptism*, and *baptism* should result in *receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit* by the laying on of hands by a true minister of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit should lead to *spiritual education* (see John 14:26; 16:13). This should lead to greater faith and obedience. There is something to be *done*.

Thus, God reveals to us that there is a step-by-step process that *leads to salvation* – a time for *working out our salvation with fear and trembling* (see Philippians 2:12). The individual must begin a process of *changing* attitudes and actions – moving from being *sinful* to being *sinless*. Is that acquired or learned in one fell swoop? Hardly! The repentant individual

moves into what is properly called *conversion* or *regeneration* – *moving from one state to another*. God does not simply zap you with a magic wand in order to make you spiritually mature! There is no spoofoom dust thrown around to bewitch you into holiness! You will *grow* through *experience*! Be aware, though, that *you can change your mind and kiss it off*. How does this conversion take place?

Paul, in Romans 12:1-3, provides an interesting answer. First, he calls on each believer to become *a living sacrifice*. God does not want you to be a *dead sacrifice* because He is the God of the *living*. Jesus Christ made a statement about that to some Pharisees in Matthew 22:32 in answer to a question about the resurrection of the dead. In Romans 14:8, 9, Paul *seems* to contradict that idea by saying that Christ “both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of *the dead and the living*” (emphasis added). How do you reconcile those two statements? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are presently *dead*. In order for God to be their God, He will have to *resurrect* them *from the dead*! The only way in which the *righteous dead* can serve the ultimate purpose of God is for them to be made *alive*.

For those who are not convinced that Jesus Christ and God the Father are two separate Beings, perhaps this further explanation will help. Read Matthew 28:18, and ask yourself who gave to Jesus Christ all power in heaven and earth? Now go to Philippians 2:5-11. Make note of what Paul says here: (a) Jesus was in the same *form* as God (the Father) and *equal* to Him (see also John 1:1, 2); (b) He willingly subjected Himself to His Companion and became flesh (see also John 1:14); and (c) as a result, God the Father highly exalted Him and gave Him the power and authority that is consistent with that exaltation (Matthew 28:18; Acts 4:12). How do you do that if you are one and the same Being?

Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 that Jesus Christ must reign until He has put down all of God’s enemies – the

last one being *death*. Ephesians 1:1-14 and Hebrews 2 show that He will be bringing converted mankind into the family of God as part of His responsibility of *reconciling all things in heaven and earth to the Father*. Once that is accomplished, He will subject Himself to the One who subjected all things to Him – which includes power over *death*. In this way, *Jesus Christ* was made *Lord* (Master) of the *living and dead*. Job 14:1-15 shows that He will not abandon us in the grave – just because we have died. It is *Jesus Christ* who will call men forth from the grave (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). When you consider the content of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 22:32, you have essentially the same message as Paul’s in Romans 14:8, 9.

So, Paul says in Romans 12:1 that we must be *living sacrifices*. What does this mean? Simply put, Paul means that we must sacrifice our relationship to the world and begin living according to the will of God. In all that you do and think, you present it to God as a reasonable, logical sacrifice. If we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21) and have His mind in us (1 Corinthians 2:9-16; Philippians 2:5), then we must take the same sacrificial approach to life that He took (compare Hebrews 10:5-7 with Matthew 7:21-23). We, too, must become sacrifices. Paul says that this is the only kind of worship that is truly spiritual (see John 4:23, 24).

The words Paul uses in v. 1 are very descriptive of this. The expression *reasonable service* in the *King James Version* is rendered *spiritual worship* in the *Revised Standard Version* and others. The Greek word *latreia* (noun) originally meant to work for pay or hire – you know, giving your strength to an employer or master for pay. It is not indicative of *slavery*; rather, it denotes *voluntarily* accepting the requirements of the job and doing them as required. The word came to mean *that to which a man gives his whole life*. In scripture, it is always used of service and worship voluntarily and wholeheartedly given to God as required. In order to do this, Paul says, one must make a

radical change in the way he approaches life: *becoming a living sacrifice*. How do you effect such a radical change in your life?

The answer leads to the second thing Paul tells us is in Romans 12:2: you have to become “***transformed by the renewing of your mind***” (emphases added). This is necessary in order to prevent one from being *conformed to the world*. Here Paul uses two words that take a little bit of space to explain. The word *conformed* comes from the Greek term *suschematisthai*. In that complicated word is the root word *schema*, which essentially means “the outward form of something.” *Schema* is constantly changing. So, Paul warns against letting the constantly changing pattern of the world guide your life. Instead, he says that you must be *transformed*. This term comes from the Greek term *metamorphousthai*, which contains the root word *morphe*. *Morphe* is the essential *unchanging* shape or element of something. So, Paul is saying that, in order for you to become a living sacrifice, you have to undergo a change, not of your *outward form*, but of your *inward personality* – of the very essence of your being. This is a spiritual *metamorphosis* to spiritual character to that does not change. Is that possible in one single moment of time? Hardly! Then, how does it occur?

The term *renewing* is from the Greek term *anakainosis*. There are two words in Greek that translate as *new*: *neos* and *kainos*. A newly manufactured automobile is *neos*. A revival of some previous philosophy (for example: Platonism) is *neos* (therefore, we have *neo-Platonism*). Both of these examples are *new in point of time*. *Kainos*, on the other hand, means *new in point of character and nature*. The New Testament is a *kainos* Testament – not a *neos* Testament. So, Paul is pointing out that your mind has to be renewed in character and nature. It cannot continue to be tied to the ever-changing concepts of the world of carnal man. The center of your being has to be different; your motivations have to be different; you must now

begin acquiring the mind of Jesus Christ. Is that possible in one single moment of time by virtue of a single confession of faith in Him? No. It takes time for you to *learn* how to be dominated by the Holy Spirit – that is, by God’s thoughts and ways. The term *sanctification* does not merely mean “a process by which the repentant individual is set apart for the fulfilling of God’s purpose.” It includes **growing** toward moral and spiritual maturity through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Because we have been *sanctified*, we are to shun all things that would defile us and prevent us from attaining the salvation God has for us.

When Paul speaks of *renewing your mind*, he intends for you to understand that your mind must be spiritually cultivated and cared for so that you can reach the fullest potential of the spiritual life. In Romans 8:9-14, he says that you must be *dominated* by the Spirit and not the carnal mind. If you do not have the Holy Spirit, then you do not belong to Christ. In fact, you have to put the carnal mind to death (*mortify*) by following the Spirit. If you are led by the Spirit of God, then you belong to God. In 1 Corinthians 9, he demonstrates how he had not allowed himself to seek the earthly rewards as payment for his devotion to the gospel. The material realm must be made subservient to the spiritual realm so you won’t lose your crown. In order to accomplish this, your mind must be disciplined/trained so that it will not frustrate the spiritual objectives.

Make no mistake about it, there is a tension between what Paul calls *flesh* and the Spirit. He addresses this in Romans 7:14-25 when he discusses how *sin* is ever-present and leads him to do things he should not do. This is often explained in theological terms as the tension between the affirmation of what God has done to bring the new age of His Kingdom to fulfillment (indicative) and His exhortation to live your *new life* in the setting of the present evil world (imperative) – that is, the tension between what God requires (indicative) and what you

are to do (imperative). For example, the *mercies of God* in Romans 12:1 are *indicative*. Look at the record of God's dealings with mankind in the past. Then look at what He has revealed about the glorious future He has planned and how we will get there from here (indicative). Becoming *living sacrifices* and *renewing our minds* in order to get there from here are *imperative*. In the process, we have to shun the man-centered and prideful world we in which we live.

Within the wrestling match of this tension, God's *will* must be *proved* (that is, discovered and shown to be true). This does not necessarily have anything to do with specific life situations – you know, “Shall I move to Nashville?” or “Does God want me to be a beautician or a town cop?” God leaves many such life choices up to the individual and his abilities and desires. God's will in this case has to do with coming to grips with God's redemptive purpose relating to mankind. Paul says in Romans 12:2 that this is possible only by the renewal of your mind. When Paul refers to your *mind*, he uses the Greek word *nous*, which designates man's *will*, not his emotions or intellectual and rational capacity. This *nous* is the *knowing, understanding, and judging* that belong to man. It is what determines what kind of attitude he will take and how he will set his own mind and heart with regard to that attitude. *God* wills that you understand His plan of salvation. *God* wills that you achieve salvation (2 Peter 3:9). Given the understanding and the power of His Holy Spirit to educate you about it, how will *you* set *your will* to accomplish it?

Colossians 3:9, 10 shows part of the answer. The *KJV* translation says that the new man is “*renewed* in knowledge” (emphasis added). The *Modern Language and Revised Standard Version* translate it to say “...*is being renewed...*” (emphasis added). The *Living Bible* is more interpretive: “...*is constantly learning more and more* of what is right, and *trying constantly to be more and more like Christ* who created this

new life within you” (emphasis added). Unlike the *KJV*, these three show *a process of growth* that demonstrates that the putting on of the new mind does not designate a once-and-for-all event like a mere confession of faith. The Christian, in effect, belongs to the coming age of God’s glorious Kingdom and the salvation it is bringing to mankind (indicative), and he is to live a new life that is expressive of that coming Kingdom (imperative). It involves a *required* process of spiritual growth and development.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul speaks of *growing up into Christ in all things*. That’s a *process*. Peter encourages us to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18; emphasis added). That means we must undergo a *spiritual maturation process* – which means that we have to be *educated* in God’s thoughts and ways. Paul points out in Ephesians 4:11-15 that God has called out and appointed various types of ministers to be the spiritual educators of God’s True Church. The expression *perfecting of the saints* (v. 12) means exactly that. God’s true ministers are charged with the responsibility of giving His people the spiritual education they need to bring them to spiritual maturity – to prevent them from falling for the deceitful teachings of the deceivers who come in the name of Jesus Christ to take advantage of their spiritual immaturity (see v. 14).

So, after reading scriptures like these, it should be apparent that simply “believing” and “confessing” is not enough – something else must come into the picture: *baptism* and *receipt of the Holy Spirit*. Once these two very important *required* steps are taken, then God will begin a process of revealing various levels of His truth to you so you will be enabled to *grow* to spiritual maturity. This process is correctly referred to as *conversion* – which means to change, to transform, to move from one state-of-being to another. Many make the mistake of believing that this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Is it? Or,

is it a *lifelong* process? It is necessary that you understand the answers to these questions.

There is a sense in which true conversion *begins* to take place at a definite point in time. But it is also true that conversion is a process by which gradual, spiritual growth and development take place. If we can believe Romans 8:9, then we know that a person without God's Holy Spirit is *not* a Christian. If the Holy Spirit is given after repentance and baptism, then unless and until the steps in Acts 2:38 are taken, true conversion cannot be said to be taking place. At the moment the Holy Spirit is given, the individual *begins the conversion process*, but is not yet *saved*. So, the *conversion process* is not finished at repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit.

As cited above, Peter admonishes the Christian convert to **grow** in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. But, the old habits and attitudes do not automatically go away. There is a process of re-training – of re-education – that must take place in the mind and heart of the convert so that he will be more like Jesus Christ. Paul admonished Christians to let the mind of Jesus be developed in them (Philippians 2:5). He told the Corinthians that, after the Holy Spirit begins to do its work in revealing God's thoughts and ways to the convert, he would have the mind of Jesus Christ working in him (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). Mark 13:13 is Mark's account of what Matthew wrote in his 24th chapter: "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." The newly converted person has made a sincere about-face in his life. However, he must now maintain control over that mind and heart for the rest of his life – remembering that the converse of that statement is also true: "He that *does not endure to the end will not be saved*." If the person were already saved – and could never lose that salvation – why would Christ find it necessary to warn about *enduring to the end*?

The answer must lie in the fact that *conversion* – the process of re-training/education – is what we are experiencing this

side of the resurrection of the dead! The Christian individual must develop the righteous character to choose good over evil, right over wrong, selflessness over selfishness. This is what is accomplished through the conversion experience over the long haul. Paul was convinced that it is a great struggle. Romans 7:14-23 is a vivid description of the wrestling match that takes place between the flesh and the Spirit. John knew that along the way the individual can and will fall – stumble – and need to continue to repent...thankfully, with Jesus Christ as our intermediary with God (1 John 1:5-2:2). Always in the lifelong process, the convert can go to God and cry out for more help and more power to be more deeply converted (Hebrews 4:14-16). It is in this sense that we must understand that we are *being converted* as we are *being saved*. This is the process that scripture refers to as *becoming perfect*.

– Two –

Becoming Perfect

In Matthew 5:48, when Christ told His disciples “You must *be perfect* just as your heavenly Father is perfect,” He was not telling them that in one instant of time they would be transformed from carnal-minded human beings to human beings who would be on par with God. It would be ludicrous to even imagine such a thing! So, what did Christ mean by that statement?

The word *be* is better translated *to become*. In other words, you are *to become* perfect like God. The Greek term translated *perfect* is one that describes a state-of-being that is arrived at through *experience*. It has nothing to do with achieving a *faultless* state-of-being. It is a state that is arrived at through a *process of experience*. You would probably understand it better if you compared it to the state-of-being we call *maturity*. *Maturity* is not a state of flawless perfection; rather, it is a state where

the individual has learned how to make decisions without doing things foolishly. In this sense, a 30-year-old man would, hopefully, be more *perfect* than a 16-year-old boy. Achieving *spiritual perfection* is essentially the same principle: one's spiritual maturity is arrived at through many learning experiences that foster greater faith in God.

This word also demonstrates that a thing is *perfect* when it measures up to the *function* for which it is designed. This lends itself to the part of the conversion process called *sanctification* – being set aside for a special, godly purpose. We can tell from several scriptures that God intended for man to ultimately bear His very own image – that of a self-sustaining life as a powerful, holy spirit-being. The *flesh* is a temporary state during which the individual undergoing this maturation process should bear the kind of spiritual fruit God seeks in order to be moved from flesh to spirit (see John 15:1-8 and Galatians 5:22-25). Only through Jesus Christ is it possible to achieve that purpose.

Genesis 1:26, 27 shows that *Elohim* (the plural form of *El* or *Eloah* – more specifically God the Father and Jesus Christ; refer to John 1:1-3, 14 and Philippians 2:5-11) decided to create humans after the *God-kind*. All plants and animals had been created after their kinds – kind begetting kind. With man, however, there were two things happening: (a) humans, who have the appearance of God with the body style they possess, would produce humans; and (b) the end-product would *potentially* be a being who would transcend the fleshly body style and become the spirit-composed God-kind. It is apparent from the rest of the account through Genesis 3 that humans would have to *choose* to be involved in the particulars of obedience to God – *the educational process* – that would enable them to be successful in this creative process.

Ephesians 1:4-14 describes the plan of God more specifically by showing what was planned *before the creation of the orderly universe*. Humans would be *placed as sons* through

Jesus Christ and forgiven of any sins they might have committed. When the time for this to be completed will have come, those *converted* humans will be changed from flesh to spirit. In fact, God will have given them a down-payment of *Holy Spirit* to **guarantee** that the change will come – a change that not only removes their sins, but also removes their *finiteness* and *earthly limitations* at the return of Jesus Christ (this is called *redemption* in v. 14).

Hebrews 1:3 shows that those who are called *sons of God*, like Jesus Christ, will bear “the express image of God’s person.” The sons of God will reign and rule with Jesus Christ to conquer the enemies of God. Hebrews 2 shows that Jesus Christ’s job is to bring us into God’s *family* as sons. Once that is accomplished, we will join Him in ruling over all that exists – beginning with the earth and moving out to the vast universe. Hebrews 12 shows that God is in the process of training us for the positions we will occupy as His sons. Verse 10 says that this is necessary so “that we might be partakers of His holiness” – implying that we will build and possess holy character now and spirit composition later because of it.

Second Peter 1:3-11 makes it plain that God’s intention is to make us “partakers of the divine nature” as the result of an educational process. For our part, we have to be *diligent* in order to “make [our] calling and election sure” in order to gain entrance into God’s family. The Apostle John adds this to the information: “We are presently the sons of God [because He has *begotten* us with His Holy Spirit], and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when [Jesus Christ] shall appear, *we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2; emphasis added).

When you add 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 to the mix, you should be able to see a very revealing plan of God for human-kind. Paul tells us in Romans 8:13-39 that we must be led by God’s Spirit in

order to receive the placement as sons. We must understand the present, temporary nature of the fleshly human body and focus on the time when God will make known His spirit-composed children. *If we are **faithful** to our calling, **nothing can prevent us from realizing this great potential!***

So, even though we grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, we do not become the mature, perfect image of God until the “corruption puts on incorruption.” Learning to be godlike and serving the godly mind is, in this sense of *perfection*, a perfection toward which we strive on a day-to-day basis – gradually converting the carnal mind into a mature, spiritual mind.

It is vitally important that one understands that the free moral agent human being can turn his mind away from God if he so chooses. And...he can pursue such an attitude to the point that he is either unwilling or unable to repent. If this were not possible, why would Paul warn us *twice* in the book of Hebrews about turning away from the faith – not enduring to the end? Hebrews 6:4-8 is not speaking of lapses of faith and practice where someone sins and repents – what some call *backsliding*. It is descriptive of a person who makes a deliberate choice to forsake the faith and not return! That possibility exists in spite of the relative sincerity of one’s initial confession of faith. When Paul speaks of *willfully sinning* in Hebrews 10:26, 27, he is speaking of a willful choice to live perpetually in sin after one has come to the knowledge of God’s truth.

Read 2 Peter 1:1-11 and note how Peter admonishes Christians to give diligence to *adding* certain things to their faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and genuine love for our fellowman. Those lacking in such things are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ – blind and not purged of their sins. Notice Peter’s encouragement in vv. 10, 11: “[You are to] give diligence to make your calling and election sure: *for if you do these things,*

you shall never fail; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (emphases added). Your calling and election are contingent upon what you do *after* you have accepted Jesus Christ, been baptized, and received the Holy Spirit. Adding those various elements to your faith is *a mandatory education process*. To think otherwise is folly.

The long and the short of the matter is simple: *unless and until we reach the place where “corruption puts on incorruption,” we are in a state of conversion – a process of spiritual transformation*. Coming to the state of *perfection* Jesus Christ spoke of in Matthew 5:48 is a *process of education/experience/training* which we must undertake on a daily basis – converting the carnal mind into a spiritual mind. This is the sense conveyed by 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11-14, the gist of which is that anyone who is still living on the *milk* of the word cannot digest the full doctrine of righteousness because he is still *a spiritual baby*. Paul’s imagery is quite revealing in the warning it presents. Solid food is for mature individuals with *minds trained by practice* to distinguish between good and evil *the way God does*. *Becoming perfect* is a process of continual education as long as you are in the flesh – what Paul refers to in Romans 12:2 as being “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Read it! Understand God’s revealed truth!

– Three –

Calling and Election

Romans 8:28-30 speaks of God’s “calling” some people according to His purpose and “specially choosing” some long ago (what is otherwise called *election*). This has been interpreted by certain groups that some are *predestined* to be saved, while others are *predestined* to be lost. At the heart of this concept, there is nothing either can do to change that *predestination*. It is generally assumed that the one chosen for salvation will live righteously because he can do no other, and vice versa. Ephesians 1:5 is used as a sister statement to this. Whatever it is supposed to mean, it is *definitely* a statement that God has *predetermined* something regarding the relationship that is supposed to exist between Himself and His creation. Let’s clear up what God’s word actually means regarding these ideas.

It is ludicrous to believe that some are predestined to be

saved while others are predestined to be condemned – especially in light of John 3:14-18. This high-profile scripture’s spotlight on “whosoever” certainly does not lend itself to a doctrine of predestination. Such a doctrinal concept demonstrates an unrealistic understanding of God’s purpose, as well as an illogical twisting of scripture in order to make it conform to the belief – rather than making the belief conform to scripture. You should understand the problems involved in such a concept. You should understand what God’s *predetermined plans* have to do with conversion and salvation. How do they *really* affect mankind?

The doctrine of predestination, as defined above, does not square with God’s having given man *free moral agency*. Free moral agency is *not* having the freedom/privilege to determine what is good and evil. Free moral agency is the freedom, or privilege, to decide *whether or not you will obey God’s definition of good and evil!* The doctrine of predestination does not allow any choice in the matter because your actions are pretty much predetermined.

Scripture is full of examples like Deuteronomy 30:15-20. As you read it, take a look at what Moses did: (a) he set before them “life and good, and death and evil”; (b) he commanded them to walk in God’s ways; and, (c) he admonished them to “**choose** life, that both you and your seed may live.” Notice what an important part **choice** plays in this matter. As the prophet Micah was inspired to declare: “[God] has *shown* you, O man, what is good.” (6:8; emphasis added). In spite of being *shown* what is good, man still has to make the personal *choice* to follow what God has *shown* them.

It is true, however, that God operates from a *predetermined plan*. But...it is equally true that His plan is open to “whosoever will,” not just a group of those He *designated* as being the “righteous.” Ask yourself this question: What real purpose would *preaching* God’s plan of salvation serve if He already

knows who will be saved and who will not? Coming to the point of belief and acceptance involves a process of God's "drawing" the individual to Himself through Christ, as well as a choice by the individual to yield to the will of God. The will of God is amply expressed in 1 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is...not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance" (emphasis added). No matter how you "slice" it, that verse is not speaking only of those who, as some claim, are predestined for salvation. Why? Because those supposedly predestined to be saved have no possibility of *perishing*!

There are two fundamental reasons why this doctrine of predestination is contrary to scriptural revelation. First, in spite of popular belief to the contrary, scripture indicates that God is a *learning God* – which means that, no matter how much He already knows, He does not know *everything before* it happens. Second, such a doctrine would require God to violate His own laws and His very own nature of holiness. That means that God would have to *engineer beforehand* situations that include sexual sins and other violations of His Ten Commandments. How does that work?

First, let's understand how God is a *learning God*. There are four examples in scripture that speak very powerfully to this matter. The first example is found in Genesis 6:5, 6. The wickedness of man affected God to the point that He *regretted* having ever made man. It *grieved Him at His heart*. This shows that God *learned* something about the wickedness of man, during 1600+ years after creating him, that brought Him to this level of grief and regret. Here's the point: If God already knows everything in advance, *what did He expect?* Why should He have allowed Himself to *regret* His plans and become so *grieved* that He would *destroy everything*?

The second example is found in Genesis 18:20, 21 where God is telling Abraham His purpose for manifesting Himself and visiting with him: "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is

great, and because their sin is very grievous.” One might be tempted at that point to declare an “Aha!” moment and declare that this shows what God *knew*. But, read on: “I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to me; **and if not, I will know**” (emphases added). *What? Didn’t He already know?* Or, was He intent on *learning* something? It should be obvious that He was conducting an *investigation* into the reports He had received. It should be obvious that He wanted to know how true those reports were. It should be *obvious*. . . .

The third example is found in Exodus 16:4 where God was about to begin raining down manna six days a week. Was this merely about providing food for the Israelites? No. While that was part of it, there was another reason attached to it that had something to do with God *learning* something about each individual Israelite. This was *before* the giving of the Ten Commandments and the “marriage” covenant agreement between God and Israel. He ordered them to gather enough manna each of the first five days of the week sufficient for each day’s need. On the sixth day (Friday), they were to gather twice as much so that they would not violate the seventh-day Sabbath rest. If they gathered more than they needed each of the first five days, the excess would turn to worms overnight. The manna gathered on the sixth day would not do so because God intended that they should have enough for their Sabbath needs. Why did He do this in this way? Verse 4 says this: “I will *test* them in this, *to see whether or not they will follow my instructions* [walk in my laws]” (emphasis added). Didn’t He already *know*? Apparently not. Why? Simply because it involved free moral agency on a day-to-day basis – the requirement to *choose* whether or not they would *obey* God’s expectations.

The last example of this is found in Jeremiah 32:35. Here God is recounting the sins of the House of Israel and the House of Judah. He shows how they persisted in the idolatry He

warned them about for centuries. He had already caused the House of Israel to be taken out of the land by Assyria – now He is telling the House of Judah, through the prophet Jeremiah, that she will be taken into captivity by Babylon. He is absolutely frustrated that He has attempted for so long to teach them His ways only to have them turn their backs on Him. Now, ask yourself this question: If predestination was His plan, why should He get so *frustrated* about trying to *teach* a thoroughly sinful nation? Didn't He *know* that this is what He would get into? Read very carefully and thoughtfully the last part of v. 35: “It *never entered my mind* that they would do this kind of abomination” (emphasis added). Can you wrap your mind around this? That such a powerful, intelligent Being would not be able to *anticipate* through His *imagination* the extent to which sin could or would affect His creation – especially after He had previously flooded the world to destroy all but Noah and his family and the animals that were rescued? I suggest that God *learned* something about those Israelites that deeply disturbed Him to the point that He would cause 10 tribes to be taken away, never – even to this present age – to return to Him and His plan...and the other House to be the perpetual “whipping boy” for the nations. His warning to us is simple: If He would do this to His own “wife,” don't imagine that any others who take His warning so lightly will escape His wrath (read Jeremiah 7:1-16 and Hebrews 10:31).

Now, how would the doctrine of predestination call for God to violate His own laws and nature of holiness? As stated above, He would have to *engineer beforehand* situations that include all manner of sins in violation of the Ten Commandments – His own holy nature. What do I mean by that? How is that possible? Let's consider the lineage of Jesus Christ – Mary's lineage – found in Luke 3:33. I use this lineage because one would expect that everything would be perfect and pose no cause for question.

The Christ was to have come through the lineage of Judah as expressed in Genesis 49:10 – and verified by Paul as having happened (see Galatians 3:19; see also Revelation 5:5-8). Luke 3:23 should read that Joseph (Mary’s husband) was the *son-in-law* of Heli. Matthew 1:16 – *Joseph’s* lineage – shows that Joseph’s father was *Jacob*. Read verse 33 carefully to see that Judah was the father of *Phares*. Here is where history gets very interesting.

Genesis 38 gives us the story. Judah, one of Jacob’s sons who is the father of the *Jews*, married a Canaanite woman named Shuah, by whom he had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. When Er was old enough, Judah arranged a marriage between him and a woman named Tamar. Because Er was a wicked man, God slew him before he had a chance to father any children. Because of the marriage traditions of the time, the next oldest son was to marry the firstborn son’s widow and by her have a son who would be counted as the *firstborn’s* heir. So, Onan was married to Tamar for that specific purpose. During the sexual intercourse, Onan withdrew from Tamar and ejaculated on the ground because he did not want his son to be counted as Er’s heir. This angered God, so he slew Onan. Since Shelah was not old enough to be married, Judah told Tamar to wait until he was old enough, and then she would be given to him as his wife. As time passed, Judah forgot to make good on his commitment. Here’s where the *engineering* beforehand would get escalated to a more problematic situation.

Tamar got tired of waiting, so she dressed up like a prostitute and visited Judah when she heard he was in her area. His wife had died, so he was a single man. When Judah saw Tamar, he did not recognize her; he thought she was a prostitute because she was wearing a prostitute’s veil. So he propositioned her for a sexual encounter – agreeing to leave with her some things that could identify him (his staff, ring, and bracelets) until he sent her payment for her services. Afterwards, Ta-

mar disappeared behind her widow's clothing again, so Judah's servant was unable to find the "prostitute" to pay her for their sexual encounter. So, Judah simply kissed it off that he had lost his staff, ring, and bracelets – the things that identified him.

When it was discovered that Tamar was pregnant, she was brought to Judah for judgment. Judah told them to burn her. Tamar showed him the staff, ring, and bracelets and told him that their owner was the father of her child. At that, Judah admitted his fault in not carrying out his commitment to Tamar to marry her to Shelah. Tamar later gave birth to twins: Pharez and Zarah. So, what's the problem here?

Look at the *engineering* – the *planning* of circumstances in advance – that would have had to take place in order to get to *Phares, who was a link in the lineage of Jesus Christ* (Luke 3:33). Look at the *sins* that had to have taken place in order for the eventual outcome to take place. Having sexual relations with one's daughter-in-law is *incest* (Leviticus 18:15). The children were illegitimate. Judah also *lied*; Er was *wicked*; Onan was *rebellious*; Tamar was *deceitful*. How could a *holy* God *plan* such things in order to get to the virgin birth of His only begotten Son? That's a *ludicrous* thought! Which, when seen in this light, points out exactly the problems with the doctrine of *predestination* as defined above. So, it should be evident that God is a *learning* God who does not plan things in such a way that causes Him to violate His own holy nature.

So, what are *calling* and *election*? Let's get biblical definitions. Let's go to Matthew 22:1-14 to find the answer. This is a parable that concludes with Christ's famous "many are *called*, but few are *chosen*" statement. What does this mean to you? The term *called* is the Greek term *kletos*, which means "invitation." An *invitation* goes out to a specially chosen group of people. In two parables, Jesus sets out a case against some people who were invited to a wedding. He equates these parables with *an invitation to be part of the Kingdom of God* – so the

reader must make that application to the contents.

Those invited would not go, and when they were reminded of the preparations that had been made for them, they made light of it and mistreated the messengers – even killing them. Because of that, the king destroyed them and their cities. Then the king told his servants to go out and get as many as they could find, good and bad, and bring them to the wedding. The second parable explains that the king threw out one guest who was not properly dressed – which leaves one to conclude that even most of the bad people ultimately made proper preparation to be able to attend the wedding.

So, Jesus Christ makes the lesson of the story simple: God has specially invited *many* to be part of His future Kingdom – and they have spurned that invitation. Subsequently reaching out to “whosoever will” might *seem* to amount to an even larger pool of potential guests. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26 that “*not many* wise men after the flesh, *not many* mighty, *not many* noble, are called.” The originally invited guests were a *smaller*, more elite group. But, Christ makes the point that, even though the *many* are called, the *few* are still chosen. So, one might conclude that even going out to the hedges and high-ways and compelling *as many as they found* only supplied as many as was originally invited – a *small* pool of guests. So, counting *both* groups, there were *many* invited, but only the *few* actually attended the wedding.

What does that mean to *you*? It simply means that *you* are now being *invited* to be part of the *wedding party of the Kingdom of God*. We’ll see that the *wedding party* is a *specially chosen group composed of the few*. The question facing you now is whether or not you will accept that invitation and come properly dressed in order to be allowed to stay.

The term *chosen* is from the Greek term *eklektos*, the word from which we get our English term *eclectic* – “selecting or made up of what seems [to be the] *best of varied sources*.”

Your being *selected* – chosen/elected – hinges on *your* desire to attend and your willingness to properly prepare for it. This is why Paul says that “There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). How does this square with Paul’s comment in Romans 8:28-30? On its face, it appears that God *did* choose some and not others just as the doctrine of predestination suggests. But we have seen some of the problems with such a doctrine. So, what is the truth?

Ephesians 1:4-14 helps us to understand this. Before the creation of the orderly universe, God marked out *human beings* for salvation in Jesus Christ – which suggests that He was aware of the possibility that mankind *could* sin and would, therefore, *need* to be saved out of its consequences. His expressed reason for creating mankind was for them to be added to the God family through Jesus Christ. So, what happens “during the course of human events”? After mankind’s first sin, God begins to give sinful mankind an *invitation* to return to Him through Jesus Christ. Those who do so are given a portion of His Holy Spirit to identify them as *chosen* to be participants in His great plan – as *potential* participants in the Kingdom of God. I say *potential* because that individual must continue to strive to “be holy and without blame before Him in love” as a means of being properly “dressed” when the *wedding dinner* actually takes place. Contrary to the teachings of many, it is possible for those who *do not endure to the end* to become *dis-invited* (read Matthew 24:13, Hebrews 6:4-8, and Hebrews 10:26, 27) because failing to endure to the end amounts to not being properly dressed for the dinner!

For those who have accepted God’s invitation, He *treats* them as though they have not sinned (*justification*; see Genesis 15:6 where Abram’s faith is *counted* to him for righteousness) and makes provision for them throughout their lives so that they will be ultimately *glorified* (that is, changed from flesh to

spirit; see Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17) when His plan comes to its completion. Barclay explains Romans 8:28-30 very succinctly: “[Paul] means that from the beginning of time God marked us out for salvation; that in due time His call came to us; but Paul also knew that the pride of the heart of man can wreck the plan of God and the disobedience of the will of man can refuse the call” (*The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*, p. 120). If that is true – and I believe that it is – then it demonstrates that the doctrine of predestination is bogus. Through this work, you are being *called* to participate in God’s end-time work of preaching the gospel of His soon-coming Kingdom to others – an invitation to be a participant in the “wedding party.” Will you do what is necessary to make your *election* certain?

– Four –

Drawn by God

John 6:44 says that no one can come to Jesus Christ unless he is *drawn* to Him by God the Father. What, exactly, does that mean? Does it indicate that you do not come to Christ by personal choice? That you are *seized* by a spiritual *tractobeam* (to use a technical term from *Star Trek*) and *pulled* to Christ whether you want to be or not? Let's understand what the Father is doing when He *draws* us to Jesus Christ.

The Greek term translated *draw* is *helkuein* (from *helko*). Its essential meaning is “to drag or draw.” Examples for this are: hauling in fish or something else with a net, dragging someone out of a building, haling someone into court, and mining stones from a deep pit. John 21:6, 11 show the disciples drawing fish with a net. In Acts 16:19, Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates in Philippi. In John 18:10, Peter drew his sword from its scabbard or from his belt. While those

are interesting examples, do they apply to what God the Father is doing when He *draws* us to Christ? No. We must look at the *figurative* definition in order to understand what it means: “pulling on one’s inner nature in order to attract.”

Jeremiah 31:3 says: “With lovingkindness I have drawn you.” The rabbinic sources use the expression *to bring near* to describe one’s *conversion* – which is descriptive of making someone a *shareholder* in the fuller knowledge of God. In John 12:32, Jesus says that, when He is lifted up (crucified), He will *draw* all men to Himself. John 6:65 changes it a bit: “No man can come unto me unless it is *granted* to him by the Father.” From all of this, you should be able to conclude that God’s desire is to make you a shareholder in the fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ, so He attempts to attract you to Him by various means – including lovingkindness. ***The fact that you are presently reading this book represents one of the many ways God tries to attract you to Jesus Christ and the knowledge of God’s thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:6-9).*** He has also attempted to attract you by making sure you have the testimony of His scriptures to lead you into the knowledge of His truth – to share with you His plan for your ultimate inclusion in the family of God by changing you from flesh to spirit.

There is a term that is not commonly used to explain this phenomenon. It is called *prevenient grace* – divine grace operating on an individual’s will *prior to* that individual turning to God. In other words, God allows a certain degree of spiritual curiosity, awareness, and understanding to take place so the individual can make an informed choice. *That is how God begins to pull on one’s inner nature in order to attract him to His truth.* Once the individual has a certain level of understanding, he is confronted with making a *choice*: accept God’s truth and pursue its demands – or walk away.

Unfortunately, there is the presence of a *spiritual deceiver* – Satan the Devil (see 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4 and Revelation

12:9) – who offers a *false Christianity* for which the *many* often fall (see 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4, 13-15). I think they go after the *warm and fuzzy feeling of emotion* and the comfort and security of *tradition* rather than the *truth*. Once they fall for that *falsehood*, then God either allows them to close their eyes and stop up their ears so they will not understand – or, He does it for them (see again Isaiah 6:8-10 and Matthew 13:9-17). They will have fallen for the concept that everyone has his own personal “truth” that God honors. The influence of multi-culturalism blinds the eyes and stops the ears to the *exclusivity* that the God of the Bible demands. The usual result is a *mixture* of truth and error – which makes the deception so attractive because it allows them to *syncretize* unacceptable traditions and the truth. If generations of “believers” have done this before them, then they feel comfortable with it. After all, could all those generations of *good people* have been wrong? Daddy? Mama? Grandpa and Grandma? Good old Pastor Smith? Unfortunately, yes (see Matthew 7:21-23).

Syncretization is the joining of various concepts that are mutually contradictory into a superficial unity that is not logical or otherwise critically examined. For example: why should “Christianity” observe the birth of Jesus Christ on December 24/25 when: (a) it is a *historical fact* that the date was adopted from the pagan celebration of the birth of the sun god and “Christianized” because some felt that it could serve as a tool to help convert pagans to Christianity; and (b) Jesus Christ’s actual birthday is unknown, but can be biblically calculated to have occurred between the middle of September and the middle of October? Also, what do bunnies, chicks, ducklings, eggs, et cetera have to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ? And there is much, much more.

It is in this sense that predestination must be understood. *Predestination* simply means that God planned something ahead of time. After all, doesn’t the term *plan* imply that it was

decided upon *before* it was put into effect? So, first and last, one must understand that his personal inclusion in God's plan is determined by his *choice* to be included and the *choices* he makes on a day-to-day basis to continue in God's plan (read again John 8:31, 32). When one looks back over the ages past, he sees God dealing with a *few* individuals to accomplish various parts of His plan. God has determined *ahead of time* that some will spread the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God. He has called out individuals in order to accomplish that, but each one thus called out must make his individual *choice* to be included. The Church established by Jesus Christ has had the commission to do this for almost 2,000 years. If we understand God's word correctly, we should be able to see that God has *not* predestinated that ***all of mankind*** will heed the message of the gospel before the return of Jesus Christ – indeed, not ***all*** will even *get* the message before His return. We see this in the fact that not everyone who is *called* is eventually *chosen*.

With every effort to *draw*, there is implied *resistance*. In other words, this is where we apply the principle of *many are called, but few are chosen*. Read Acts 26:28 for an excellent example of *resistance*. Paul poured out a powerful witness before King Agrippa only to have him say “You *almost* persuaded me to become a Christian” (emphasis added). In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus discussed with His disciples those who allowed personal problems to set up resistance to His call. Each had his own excuse for not responding immediately. Notice Jesus' conclusion: “No man, having set his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” You cannot truly desire to submit to God's *drawing* if you want to keep one eye on the past and one foot in the present evil age. You must put aside your *resistance*! Sadly, the *many* are not willing to do that. It is they of whom it is said that they have “eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear” (see Isaiah 6:8-10 and Matthew 13:9-17).

God has pre-determined that those who are *drawn and remain faithful until the return of Jesus Christ* will be given eternal life and serve as judges, priests and kings under Jesus Christ in His Kingdom *before* salvation is given to the *many*. How do we *know* this to be true? Revelation 20:4-8 is a description of this very thing. Verse 4 shows a group of resurrected saints to whom is given the authority to *judge* (read 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). Verse 6 shows that they will also be priests and *reign with Christ* (which is kingship). Judges, priests, and kings. *No other group of those who are subsequently brought to salvation will be made judges, priests and kings under Jesus Christ!* What an absolute honor!

The parentheses in v. 5 is oddly placed. The expression “This is the *first* resurrection” should come *before* the parentheses because the “rest of the dead” come up in *another resurrection* after the 1,000 years are completed. This parenthetical statement is a clue that God is not finished with mankind’s salvation when Jesus Christ returns. Let’s understand a few reasons why this would be true.

The primary reason is found in the use of an *ordinal number: first* (vv. 5, 6). *Ordinal* means that there is an *order*. For instance: 1 Corinthians 15:23 says that every man will be raised from the dead “*in his own order*.” Then it shows Christ as the *firstfruits*. In Acts 26, Paul relates his conversion experience to King Agrippa and explains why the Jews persecuted him. In vv. 22, 23, he tells Agrippa that the “prophets and Moses” said “That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the *first* that should rise from the dead.” Now, this, *at the least*, tells us that *no one* before Jesus Christ had done this. And...we can conclude that, since no one will do it *until Christ returns*, then no one has done it since He did it (see Hebrews 11:39, 40). Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:13 that “*No man* has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven” (emphasis added). That tells us that neither *Enoch* nor *Elijah* was taken to

heaven – or, Jesus Christ and Paul are liars. *If Jesus Christ did this **first**, then no one did it **before** He did it!* That’s how simple it is to figure out. It’s *ordinal*. Let’s see how God’s word *foreshadows* this for us.

God’s commanded holy days are given in Leviticus 23. The meanings of each of these holy day periods represent steps in God’s plan of salvation: (a) Passover is the foreshadow of the sacrifice of Christ; (b) the Feast of Unleavened Bread represents the necessity for the convert to come out of sin (leavening); (c) Pentecost foreshadows the giving of the *firstfruits* of God’s Holy Spirit *and* the harvest of the *firstfruits* in the early *small* harvest; (d) the Feast of Trumpets foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ to conquer the nations of the world; (e) the Day of Atonement foreshadows the two-part plan of God in which Christ is not only sacrificed to atone for our sins, but actually has all of our sins placed upon Him to be carried away to a desert place never to return; (f) the Feast of Tabernacles basically represents the temporary nature of our fleshly bodies, as well as Jesus Christ living among us as King of Kings and Lord of Lords – reigning over the Kingdom of God for 1,000 years to effect the great harvest of *secondfruits*; and, (g) the eighth day at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles is called the Last Great Day of the Lord and the Great White Throne Judgment – a time when the deceived and uninformed will be given an opportunity to make an informed decision about their salvation (a second resurrection from the dead to temporary mortality). This Great White Throne Judgment period will also include those infants who died before they reached the *age of accountability* – perhaps even including the multiple millions of aborted fetuses so callously killed due to someone’s misguided concept of when life begins – or their selfish idea of birth control. *Thirdfruits*.

Hidden in the holy days between Passover and Pentecost is an event called *the wavesheaf offering* (Leviticus 23:9-13). During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there will occur a regu-

lar weekly Sabbath. The day after that Sabbath is the day when a *sample* of the harvest is taken as an offering to God. It is the *first* of the *firstfruit harvest*. It is taken and waved before God with other appropriate offerings. This “sheaf of the firstfruits” represents Jesus Christ. This is implied in Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15:23: “Christ the *firstfruits*.” It is the idea behind his statement in Acts 26:23 that Jesus was prophesied to be the “*first* that should rise from the dead.” Paul also states in Romans 8:29 that Jesus Christ was pre-ordained to be the “*firstborn* among many brethren.” John calls Him “the *firstbegotten* from the dead” (Revelation 1:5). Paul also told the Colossians that He was the “*firstborn* from the dead” – no one but Jesus Christ has ever been raised from the dead to eternal, spirit-composed life.

Wherever such statements are made, it demonstrates the prophetic fulfillment of the wavesheaf offering. If you compare John 20:17 to Matthew 28:9, you will see that early on the morning after the weekly Sabbath – that is, on the first day of the week – Mary was told not to touch Him because *He had not yet ascended to the Father*. However, later in the day, His disciples were allowed to hold Him by His feet. Why? Because as the *wavesheaf offering* – the *first* of the *firstfruits* – He ascended to the Father between those two encounters. Thus, He fulfilled the foreshadowed event.

James 1:18 shows that all who have been drawn, called, and chosen from the beginning to the return of Jesus Christ are also *firstfruits*. That also means that no other humans will have been changed from flesh to spirit *before or since* the resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to 1 Corinthians 15:23, these *firstfruits* will be those who are raised from the dead *at Christ’s coming*. Please pay attention to the *ordinal number* being used. It is a key to understanding God’s truth about the resurrection of the *dead* as opposed to the pagan concept of the innate immortality of the soul that goes immediately to heaven or hell at

the death of the body – or is reincarnated.

The next *in order* will be those over whom Christ and the saints rule during the 1,000 years. Then, there will be those who are in the resurrection at the end of the 1,000 years. Who knows after that? Well, God’s word has some interesting things to say about them, too!

First is an *ordinal* number. *One* is a *cardinal* number. When you have a *first*, you *must* have a *second* – not necessarily a third, fourth, et cetera (but it does not preclude having them). Hebrews 11:35, 40 indirectly refers to this *first* resurrection as a *better resurrection...some better thing for us*. *Better* is a comparative term that signals the comparison of two things: the first resurrection and any subsequent resurrection. The same principle is not true with cardinal numbers. With cardinal numbers, there is no necessity to look for a two or three or four, et cetera.

So, it appears that God is presently *drawing* out a *ruling class* for His coming Kingdom – not made up of the wise and noble of this present age of mankind. Instead, He has gone to the “hedged and highways” to call the weak, the base, and the despised to attend the “marriage supper” of Jesus Christ. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:20-31 with Revelation 19:5-9 to see that the “wedding” takes place just prior to Christ and the saints conquering the nations of the world. Notice, too, that “His wife has made herself ready.” He has drawn her with lovingkindness, and she has responded appropriately without resistance. She represents the *firstfruits* from the dead who have been given *eternal life* at the return of Jesus Christ so they can inherit an *eternal kingdom* with the *eternal* Christ.

I understand that this is different from what is commonly taught. But, you should understand that it is God’s prerogative to determine things ahead of time if He so desires. He foretold the coming of Cyrus over 150 years before he appeared (Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1, 13) and Josiah about 300 years before he was

born (1 Kings 13:1, 2). There is no contradiction here to what I have said above. I repeat: *It is God's prerogative to determine things ahead of time if He so desires*. That includes determining that certain individuals will be born. However, that is not how He *typically* does it.

His *typical* approach is to set things into motion to “draw” individuals to Himself through Jesus Christ. That “drawing” does not end with the return of Jesus Christ. He doesn't simply return to take people back to *heaven* – which, in fact, contradicts the concept of the immortal soul that leaves the body *at death* and goes to its reward of either eternity in heaven or hell. Why have a 1,000-year kingdom if you are not going to continue to invite people to participate in the plan of salvation? God's *calling* comes as a result of the preaching of God's truth – not from the *pretenders*. He is not presently *calling* or *drawing* the *many* – which means that *you* are in a very important position to make the most important choice of your life.

– Five –

Salvation *Through* Faith

Ephesians 2:8 states: “By grace are you saved through faith and not by yourselves – it is the gift of God: not by anything that you have done, lest anyone should boast.” You might say: “Well, *I’m* the one who has to have the *faith!*” Go back and read the passage carefully. It states that it is *through* faith that you are saved – not *by* faith. *Faith* does not save you! Of course, you cannot be saved *without* faith – but...faith, in and of itself, does not save you. And...faith in *what*?

Read Paul’s statement again. What is the *gift* of God: the *grace*, the *salvation*, or the *faith*? It is important to understand this statement in the context of salvation as a *gift* from God. Too many have thought that salvation is a gift of grace and have left out the fact that the gift is initiated *because of faith*. It is obvious from Genesis 26:5, 6 that God blessed Abraham *because of his faith*, which consisted of obeying God’s voice,

His charge, commandments, statutes, and laws. So, it is obvious that Abraham *did* something. James 2:14-26 makes it abundantly clear that *faith* is to be demonstrated by *the works of faith*. Something must be *done* by the individual of faith because it demonstrates his commitment to his “calling.” But – and here is the larger question – does that *earn* you salvation? No. How do you explain this seeming contradiction?

Genesis 26:5, 6 demonstrates that God gave to Abraham’s descendants a land inheritance and an ancestral legacy that could not have been a product of their own making, even if they tried for an eternity to accomplish it. Salvation is a similar type of inheritance. It is what God has chosen, of His own volition, to give to mankind for his faith and the attendant works that should come from it. Salvation – being changed from flesh to spirit – is not something that mankind could achieve for himself in an eternity of time...no matter what he *does*.

Paul’s inclusion of the concept of *grace* in Ephesians 2:8 is also instructive here. That word in Greek is *charis*. This word acquaints us with *divine favor and goodwill*. It tells us about *God’s gracious care and help* at a time when we have shown ourselves to be transgressors against what He so lovingly designed His plan for humanity to be (also, compare Ephesians 1:4-14 to Romans 5:6-11). It is the word from which we derive our English term *charity*.

Read the entirety of 1 Corinthians 13 in the *KJV* and note how the term is used throughout. Paul’s conclusion in v. 13 is that *charity* is greater than *faith* and *hope* – even though all three are eternal values. Even though *faith* is the only thing that can *guarantee* the blessings we hope for and *prove* the realities that are presently unseen (Hebrews 11:1), *charity* is greater. Why? Simply because of the fact that, without God’s *charity*, we would die the death from which there is no recovery. If such an awful fate occurred to us, we would not have to even be concerned about any guarantees or proofs. They would be

of no consequence. How have we been the recipients of God's *charity*?

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that He chose us in Jesus Christ – *before He created the heavens and earth* – “that we should be *holy* and *without blame* before Him *in love*” (emphasis added). Have we been? Far from it! His divine judgment for our transgressions was *death from which there is no possibility of recovery* (see Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:22, 23). Yet, He had already made provision for giving His own Son as an atonement sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16-18). What can we ever do to deserve that rescue? ***The solution to our eternal death was made possible by God's grace – not by anything that we could ever do for Him or ourselves!*** He could have just as easily given us a prosperous, happy life in the temporary fleshly body and let that be our only reward. He could have given us a bag of gold – or a fine watch. But, He chose something of more ultimate value to Himself and us. So, we should be able to see that *grace* and *salvation* are both God's *gift*.

It is true, however, that *you* are the one who has to develop and nourish *true faith* in order to be the recipient of God's grace. Faith is an *active* demonstration that: (a) an individual puts his trust in God, and (b) God can trust that individual to be committed to his “calling.” Unless that faith is demonstrated, God's grace will not be extended; as long as it is demonstrated, God's grace will be extended. What is that faith?

Romans 4:20, 21 expresses it rather succinctly: “[Abraham] did not *stagger* at the promise of God through *unbelief* – but was *strong in faith*, giving glory to God – and was *fully persuaded* that God was able to perform what He had promised” (emphasis added) Without this kind of attitude, it is *impossible* to please God because God expects *us* to believe in His existence and to *diligently* seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). So, contrary to popular belief, grace and salvation are not *totally free*. There is a *price* to be paid. What, exactly, are the blessings we are to

hope for?

This is going to fly in the face of the gospel that is typically preached by Traditional Christian denominations. Be prepared to search this out so that you will know God's *truth* – and, therefore, will understand in what to put your faith and what to expect from God as part of His plan of salvation. Traditional Christianity changes language and inserts concepts that are foreign to God's revelation.

We need to concern ourselves with two basic questions: (a) What did God *promise* Abraham? and (b) What did Abraham *expect*? Read the account of God's relationship with Abraham in Genesis 12 through 26. These chapters reveal two things: (a) God promised Abraham a section of territory *on the earth* (see Genesis 15:18-21 and Romans 4:13-25) and (b) a descendant to inherit it. There is nowhere in these chapters where God ever promised Abraham *heaven* as a reward. We see in Hebrews 6:15 that Abraham "obtained the promise." We know he actually received only one part of the entire promise: Isaac – his very own son with his wife Sarah – whose lineage includes Jesus Christ. He obtained him by *physical birth* (see Genesis 21:1-5) and by *a type of resurrection from the dead* (compare Genesis 22:1-14 and Hebrews 11:17-19). But, we see in Hebrews 11:13 that *none* of God's saints has yet received the *country and city* designed and built by God – that is, the *territory* God promised Abraham. And...vv. 39, 40 explain that ***all of God's saints will receive it together, not one at a time as they die!***

But, God did include *all nations* in the blessing He intended to give to Abraham because He changed his name from Abram to Abraham – "father of many nations" (see Genesis 17:1-8; 22:15-18). This was not, as some contend and teach, an *earthly* promise to the *Jews* because: (1) Abraham was not a *Jew* or an *Israelite* (the *Jews* are one of the twelve tribes of *Israel* who come from *Judah* – and Israel/Jacob, also not a *Jew*, was Abra-

ham's grandson); and (2) *all nations* were included in this blessing.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 3:8, 9 that God actually preached the *gospel* (a reference to the gospel of the establishment of the Kingdom of God – see Mark 1:14, 15) to Abraham by telling him that *all nations* would be blessed in him. Read carefully v. 9: “So then *they who are of **faith** are blessed **with faithful Abraham***” (emphases added). What this means is that those in the *true faith* are to inherit *with Abraham* what God promised him!

Paul goes on to show in v. 16 that Jesus Christ is the “seed” in Abraham’s lineage in whom all nations will be blessed. Now read vv. 26-29. What does it tell you? Does it tell you that *heaven* is the reward of the saved? Or does it tell you that the *true Christian* will inherit the same thing that Abraham and Jesus will inherit – *according to God’s promise* (see also Romans 8:14-17)? What are the consequences of having faith in the *wrong* thing? If God promises that you will inherit *the earth* with Abraham and Jesus Christ, what happens if you believe that He promised you *heaven*? Will God honor your misplaced faith? No...He has *shown* you His truth.

Now, read very carefully Hebrews 6:13-20. In what two ways did God *secure* His promise to Abraham and those who will inherit it with him? Genesis 12 begins the *promise*; Genesis 15 is the setting forth of the *oath*. What does *immutable* mean? It not only means that *it **will not** change, it also means that it **cannot** be changed*. Both the promise and the oath are *immutable*. God cannot lie, so people of *true faith* should have *strong consolation* in this and strive to *lay hold of this hope* – which is a sure and steadfast anchor of our faith. Now, does this mean that your faith – *this hope* – is to be in *going to heaven*, or *inheriting the earth* with Jesus Christ and Abraham? Matthew 6:19-21 is not Jesus’ instruction for you to place your faith in *going to heaven*. It is instruction for you to put your

faith and trust in a power that has the *eternal* ability to keep your *treasure* safe from destruction. The powers of this earth's temporary realm do not have that ability. So, surely the *object of your faith* is important to God.

What did Abraham *expect*? Hebrews 11:10: "He looked for *a city which has foundations*, whose builder and maker is God" (emphasis added). The typical response to this statement is to locate this city in *heaven* and to try to connect it with John 14:1-3 where Jesus says that He is: (a) preparing a place for us, (b) will come again, and (c) receive us unto Himself. Since He mentions that His Father's house contains many *mansions*, the idea has developed that the saved will be taken by Jesus back *to heaven to live in mansions on streets of gold!* Remember, however, that God *never* promised Abraham *heaven* as a reward for his faithfulness. So, what does this verse tell us about what Abraham *expected*? We can tell by the contrast that is made between *living in tents* and looking forward to *a city with foundations* that Abraham expected something that is *permanent*, not temporary like a transitory, mobile tent.

Receive you unto myself in John 14:3 does, indeed, mean that Jesus will come and take true believers somewhere. The Greek word for *receive* is *paralambano*, which means "to take along or to take with." In other words, His disciples (the saints) will accompany Him to a destination He has prepared beforehand. We have already seen that He has made some preparations with Abraham and his descendants regarding a territory on the earth, but we'll have to let the Bible interpret the Bible in this situation. We find a reference to this return in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

When He *descends* toward the earth, what happens? He effects the resurrection of the faithful *dead* and changes them and the faithful *living* to spirit composition (compare this to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58). Verse 17 says that they are "caught up together...in the clouds, to meet the Lord *in the air: and so*

shall we ever be with the Lord” (emphases added). Revelation 14:14-16 shows Him sitting on a cloud in *the earth’s atmosphere* waiting for the Father to tell Him when to effect the resurrection (see Matthew 24:29-36 – note that only the Father knows when that will be). Does this imply that we shall always be with Jesus *in the clouds of the air*? No. It simply means that, at this point, we will have been *received* or *gathered to Jesus Christ in the clouds* to go with Him wherever He goes from there. *Where will He go from this point? To heaven?* No.

If you remember that scripture is inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and that Paul had only the Old Testament when he wrote that, then the next scriptural reference is a natural reference to look at because of its reference to *the return of Jesus Christ* – who is the Lord God of the Old Testament. Let’s look at Zechariah 14:1-5. This is a description of one of the reasons He returns: *to conquer the nations of the world* (see Daniel 2:44, 45 and 7:13-28). Notice the last part of Zechariah 14:5: “the Lord my God shall come, and *all the saints with you*” (emphasis added). Putting the two scriptures together, you should be able to see that Jesus and the saints, once they meet in the clouds of the earth’s atmosphere, will go immediately to the Mount of Olives – not *heaven*. What does this mean? Look at v. 9: “And the Lord shall be King *over all the earth*” (emphasis added). Now, add four more scriptures: Revelation 5:10, 11:15, 19:11-16, and 20:4. What do you see revealed? It appears that Jesus and the saints are going to be *on the earth* for 1,000 years ruling over the nations that He and the saints conquer upon His return. Where will His headquarters be? Read Isaiah 2:1-5. *Jerusalem*.

Deuteronomy 1:29-33 records an event just prior to Israel’s entrance into the *Promised Land* that serves as a *type* of John 14:1-3. As you read v. 33, notice these three salient points: (a) the Lord God preceded Israel into the Holy Land; (b) He searched out a place for them to live; and (c) He returned to

show them the way to it. John 14:1-3 expresses the same three salient points – but taking the saints to *heaven* would be inconsistent with God’s promises and oath and plan. You must understand that John 14:1-3 promises true Christians that they will be *where Jesus Christ is* – not that they will receive mansions in *heaven* the moment they die. To think otherwise is to ignore what God has revealed in His word of truth.

So, Abraham *expected* God to construct, *in the land He promised Abraham as an inheritance*, a city He had designed. Prophets after Abraham saw this and tried diligently to explain what God has planned. A few examples of these prophetic revelations are easy to read. Isaiah 11 is a brief overview of the rule of Jesus Christ. Verse 4 is the pivotal verse: “With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of *the earth* [see Matthew 5:5]: and He shall smite *the earth* with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked” (re-read Revelation 19; emphasis added). The context of the entire scripture shows that this is not the present-day “Christian” era.

Daniel 2:44, 45 and 7:13-27 show several things: (a) Christ (the *stone cut out of the mountain without hands*) will break up all of the earth’s kingdoms and bring them into obedience to His rule (see also Revelation 11:15); (b) there will never again be a human kingdom to have despotic rule over mankind; (c) Jesus’ rule will be over all people, nations, and languages (this is not taking place in *heaven*); and (d) the saints will fight alongside Christ to take control of the kingdoms “***under the whole heaven***” – and this Kingdom on earth “is an *everlasting Kingdom, and all dominions* [earthly governments] ***shall serve and obey Him***” (emphases added). Revelation 19 and 20 show how consistent God is in His revelation of His truth. Christ and the saints conquer the kingdoms of the earth and rule them with *a rod of iron*.

Isaiah 2:1-5 demonstrates exactly how that government will

effect change upon the earth – and the place from which it will go out to the world: ***Jerusalem – a city which will be totally rebuilt by God in heaven and placed upon the new earth at the end of this 1,000-year Kingdom*** (see Revelation 21:1-3).

Then, Ezekiel 37 shows what happens at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom when the second resurrection is effected. Both houses of Israel – Israel and Judah – are resurrected in physical bodies to be brought back to the *Promised Land* in order to become participants in the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-29; Romans 11; and Hebrews 8, 9). Simply put, *this is what Abraham expected*.

Here's the part that is so difficult for people of so-called *faith* to accept: *If salvation is through faith, then it stands to reason that one's faith must be correctly placed in what God has revealed – not in what is commonly taught by tradition! Faith in the gospel of the Kingdom of God is required – not optional*. Now, where do you stand on this matter? If you desire to be where Christ is for eternity, what options do you have? Mansions on streets of gold in *heaven*? No.

Abraham considered himself a pilgrim and stranger in the land he was to inherit – *until that city is placed there by God. That city and that situation* were the things for which he hoped. Hebrews 11 accentuates the things that God's faithful servants endured because of what they saw is in store for mankind in the future – because of what is in store for the people of *true faith* in the future. Your *salvation* is dependent on having *true faith* and *believing what God has revealed about it*.

Faith: Guarantee and Proof

*T*he Jerusalem Bible translates Hebrews 11:1 to read like this: “Only faith can *guarantee* the blessings we hope for, or *prove* the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen” (emphasis added). The *KJV* says that it is “the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen” (emphasis added). The essential meaning of this is that faith is more than a wistful longing or a warm and fuzzy emotion. It is a hope that is *thoroughly convinced* that what has been promised is *absolutely true* – that it will *absolutely* come to pass. The faith of the true Christian is not mere hope; it is *absolute certainty*.

It would not make sense, however, to claim that *human faith* creates this guarantee and proof. Paul’s argument here is intended to show the *function* that faith serves for the believer because these things hoped for and unseen have *independent* and *objective* validity – the capability of being justified or de-

fended beyond the individual's feelings and emotions. This is not an encouragement to believe something that is insufficiently supported by evidence – or something that is insufficient to establish knowledge.

The function of knowledge is to increase the *probability* of the truth of an idea. In other words, the more you gather *true facts* about something based on your *experience* with it, the more likely you are to be able to establish the *truth* about it. You begin to find that 90% certainty is more reliable than 30% certainty. In the process, you have to be careful not to allow the *truth* to be distorted by *counterfeit* experience. *True faith* is not based on assumption or wishful thinking propelled by *counterfeit* knowledge. There is an intellectual content in *faith* that is based on *experience* with the subject being *proved* to be true.

Science is supposed to reflect *knowledge* (the word comes from the Latin term *scientia* and means “having knowledge”); however, *science*, as we know it, makes it increasingly very difficult for *true faith* to exist. To paraphrase how a science teacher friend of mine once put it: “*God* and *faith* have to be left out of the mix in order for *true knowledge* to exist. The concept of *God* is such a *subjective* [that is, *personal*] concept that it cannot be depended on to establish *true knowledge*.”

I know that the concept of *God* has become highly subjective, but *knowledge* based on the *true God's* revelation of *truth* is not *subjective*; it is *objective* – that is, it is *factual* without being distorted by personal feelings or prejudices. That is the basic idea behind Paul's statement in Romans 1:18. As some translations put it, men have *suppressed the truth by their unrighteousness*. This is the basis for God's warnings not to add to or diminish from His word (see Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:5, 6 and Revelation 22:18, 19). Regardless of such warnings, *faith* has become very *subjective*. How?

Men have chosen to interpret their own concepts of *God* and *righteousness* relative to what *they* want the outcome of

their actions to be when God judges them: “God will overlook this or that *because I want to do this or that **without** suffering the penalties brought about by it.* After all, it is not as bad as such-and-such.” So, they create *God* in their own image (Romans 1:22, 23). The irony of this is readily apparent when you understand that this friend of mine was a professing Christian.

So, how does *faith* serve as a *guarantee* of the things we hope for and the *proof* of things that presently remain unseen? What makes *true faith* difficult for the typical person is based on *reason* and *understanding* – that is, the ability to think with a sane or sound mind. The result of God’s gift of the *Holy Spirit* is the gradual building of a *sound mind*: “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7; emphasis added). The Greek word Paul uses here is *sophronismos*, which means “self-mastery; self-discipline; self-control that keeps one from running away or being swept away.” So, in this context, it is *divinely given* self-mastery. Why is that important?

There is a revealed concern about a way that *seems right* but leads to *death* (Proverbs 14:12). It is the product of *deception* – being tricked or fooled or beguiled or led astray. *Satan*, the adversarial spirit, is the great deceiver (see Revelation 12:9 and 2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:4, 13-15). Therefore, there is a concern about those who come *in the name of Jesus Christ* and do nothing but *deceive* others (Matthew 7:21-23; 24:4, 5; Galatians 1:6-9). God has provided spirit-led ministers to keep His elect from being “children [who are] tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). God’s provision of this *spirit of truth* (see John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:13, 14) is done in order to provide His elect the means by which their *reason* and *understanding* are not tainted with the deceptions brought by the carnal mind (see Romans 8:1-9 and Ephesians 1:4-14).

Faith does not replace knowledge – it is a necessary part of all knowledge. By the same reasoning, knowledge also does not replace faith. As stated above, as knowledge grows, faith should grow along with it. When people tell me that they believe what I tell them, their confidence in me is based on their knowledge of me and the truth I represent. The more intimately they know me and have experience with me, the more they have a basis for utmost confidence in what I tell them. The rationale is simple: the more complete knowledge you have about God, the more perfect/mature your faith will be. That knowledge and confidence produce *faith*. *Faith* is the response we make to that knowledge. I cannot have complete faith and confidence in something about which I know very little. It would be very difficult for me to grab just any old car out of the parking lot and set off on a long, hard journey. My experience would be fraught with *fear* and *anxiety* – not *faith*. The more experience I have had with the car, the more I would know about its machinery and accessories. The more I know about those things and how the car performs relative to them, the more faith I can have in its ability to survive a long, hard journey.

Even the evolutionists, who do not admit the involvement of “God” in creation, have *faith* in the knowledge they have gained from their experience with their studies and experiments. The Theory of Evolution is, in fact, a *faith* to them – albeit, a faith without the benefit of “God.” Absent “God,” the atheist also expresses *faith* that there is no “God” to be had. Whatever that *faith* consists of, it expresses the *certainty* that it is valid. So, the Christian is not an oddball because he clings to his *faith*. *But...the Christian has to be sure that his faith is not misplaced or counterfeit.* To be sure, faith as a response to a known *truth* can be both misdirected and counterfeit based on the assumptions that form its foundation (refer again to Proverbs 14:12). The true Christian must have faith in *God’s* truth.

For example: I cannot have faith in a creation without a Creator because I cannot accept as *truth* the idea that all that exists is the product of dumb, blind chance – a celestial accident. The intertwining of *laws* and *design* demands a lawgiver and a designer. The existence of matter and energy are too unique to have occurred by *accident* and *chance*. The existence of the iris of the eye, a circulatory system, and ingestion, digestion, and elimination are too well designed to have been the product of natural selection, adaptation, and survival of the fittest. So are the menstrual cycle and the salivary glands (see Psalm 139:14). What about *learning* as opposed to *instinct*?

Without my active interest in the Driving Force behind creation, I would have no interest in gaining knowledge about it because it would be subject to *uncertainty*. My discovery of and experience with that Driving Force helps to focus and clarify the knowledge I gain. The more clearly I understand that Driving Force, the more *certain* I become that it is alive and doing well – and...that It has a reciprocal interest in me (which Evolution does not have). My *experience* becomes the foundation of my certainty – my faith. If I do not gain sufficient *knowledge* and *experience* to establish that faith, my interest will dissipate.

My concern with *the forces of deception* drives my search for *proof* and *truth*. I don't settle for just any old spiritual gas that comes along. I do not allow myself to believe that I have ever learned all there is to know about this Driving Force – but I have complete faith in what I have discovered in my journey toward perfect faith. This is why Peter said that we must **grow** in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and why Paul was so concerned about those who choose to remain **babes** in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14). It is a way of life – not just a belief unsustained by knowledge and experience.

So, how does this faith *guarantee* the blessings hoped for

and *prove* the existence of the realities that remain unseen? First and foremost, you have to understand that *true faith* is not brought about by the machinations of the human mind. It is not created by the certainties that *the human mind* creates. It is created by the certainties that *God reveals*. *True faith* is the response of the human mind to what *God has revealed*. When science leaves that revelation “out of the mix,” then it leaves out an incredible portion of what is, in fact, *true knowledge*. When the human tries to create its own *truth*, it might or might not be in concert with *God’s truth*.

This is the point of Isaiah 55:6-11. The human must be willing to forsake his own insufficient ability to establish *true knowledge* because God’s thoughts and ways are so much higher than man’s that it is ridiculous to even assume any parity between them. God’s ability to *declare* and *accomplish* is far superior to man’s. God cannot be led astray or swept away from His own purpose; the human can. With that in mind, perhaps you can understand that *faith*, *grace*, and *salvation* are all the gift of God. While *you* are the one who must exercise faith, the *foundation* of that faith is not *your* creation. It is arrived at by *the revelation of God*.

Read 1 Corinthians 2 and pay attention to several salient points: (a) there is a great deal of difference between God’s wisdom and the wisdom of the world; (b) True Christians operate from a wisdom that is actually *hidden* from the world; (c) this *hidden wisdom* is *revealed* by God through His Holy Spirit – giving the True Christian knowledge and understanding not available to what Paul calls the *natural man* (the meaning of which is made plain by the context); and (d) these things of God are *spiritually discerned* – not arrived at by the normal, ordinary mind of man.

This is totally in concert with statements by Jesus Christ in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13, 14 regarding the function of the Holy Spirit. It has three primary functions: (a) to teach and

remind the true believer all the things Jesus Himself taught; (b) to be a guide into God's truth; and (c) to bring this wisdom and understanding of God's truth directly from God Himself. This provision for the *foundation* of your faith is a *gracious gift*.

Paul says in Ephesians 1:13, 14 that this Holy Spirit is God's *arrhabon* – God's ***security deposit guaranteeing the full payment of all that God has promised and revealed***. Here's the point of God's expectations of your faith: He expects you to have *absolute certainty* that He will deliver what He has planned and promised. If you are unwilling to do that, then your faith *has no guarantee or proof*.

Here is where you should understand Romans 4:13-25. Notice how Abraham's faith is described. He believed that God *raises the dead* (there's no belief in an immortal soul that never dies and that goes to heaven or hell immediately upon the death of the body) and that He has the ability to declare a thing that shall be as though it already exists. He was not *weak in faith* and did not *stagger through unbelief* – that is, he was not at odds with himself, doubtful, wavering, or hesitant. He did not withdraw or shrink back when faced with overwhelming odds against what he was to have faith in. He was *strong in faith* and *fully persuaded* that God can and will do what He had promised – even though he himself might die and have to lie in the grave until God's time for completing His plan has come. Not receiving it before he died was not a problem; it was still as good as done. He's been dead for about 3900 years....

Are you willing to accept God's guarantee and proof regarding the revelation of the things He has promised the True Christian? If not, you have no guarantee or proof. Your unwavering faith in God's true revelation is both the foundation and evidence of that guarantee and proof.

– Seven –

How Faith *Proves* the Existence of Things Yet Unseen

One assumes that the individual believer has come to grips with the existence of God. Hebrews 11:6 says that “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]: for he that comes to God *must believe that He exists*, and that He is the rewarder of those who *diligently seek Him*” (emphasis added). This is not an either/or proposition. Both things must be put into action: (a) belief in God’s existence and (b) diligently seeking Him. Romans 4:20, 21 says: “Since God had promised it, Abraham refused either to deny it or even doubt it, but drew strength from faith and gave glory to God, convinced that God had power to do what He had promised.” If we translate this concept into other types of promises made by God, we are able to see the victorious life in Christ at work in such things as overcoming carnality, becoming recipients of healing, and re-

ceiving the manifold benefits of physical blessings.

Paul does an interesting thing as he lays out the definition of faith in Hebrews 11. First, he gives seven (7) illustrations of people who accomplished certain things *by faith* (vv. 3-11). Then, he briefly summarizes his point (vv. 13-16) by making three important observations about the things these faithful people saw through the eyes of faith: (a) they were *persuaded* that God's promises were real; (b) they *welcomed/embraced* what God had shown them beyond this present world; and (c) they admitted that *they could not settle for this world as it presently exists*. In other words, they were required by their faith to accept their destiny in the distant future.

Being *pilgrims and strangers* and *desiring a better country* does not mean that they were persuaded that God had promised to take them to *heaven*. It means that they desired a world in which strife, corrupt institutions and leaders, broken lives, competitive greed, and concentrated power do not and cannot hold sway.

Next, he gives eleven (11) more illustrations of things accomplished by people who were sustained *by faith* (vv. 17-31). Then, he gives numerous examples of witnesses who received the benefits of doing various things *by faith* (vv. 32-38). Finally, he evaluates the faith of all these people relative to what we should be experiencing (vv. 39, 40). All of this information is derived from *scripture* – God's written *revelation* of His relationship with these witnesses and characters (*The Interpreter's Bible*; vol. 11; pp. 718, 719). It includes belief in God's revelation of a coming Savior to rule this world in order to make it the place God desires and promises. What is the point? He is emphasizing the foundational elements of true faith: *belief in the existence of God* and *rewards for those who diligently seek Him*.

Let's look at Malachi 3:10-12 to see one example of how this works. God challenges the person of weak and wavering

faith to bolster his faith by *testing* Him. What good is belief in God if there are no benefits to be derived from such a belief? God says that there are benefits to be derived from it – and if you don't believe that, then you should *put it to the test instead of shrinking away from it!* In this case, it involves one simple action: giving God's work one-tenth of your increase (tithing).

What benefit should you expect that you could not produce for yourself? God will bless you in ways that you cannot provide for yourself – and others will be attracted to your success (thus, giving you an opportunity to share your faith and bring more glory to God). Is it possible that you could have *non-productive* periods of time in your life? Yes. But, if that is understood within the concept of God putting *you* to the test to see if your faith is genuine, then you know that such a thing is only temporary. If you show yourself to be genuinely faithful, He will restore to you in manifold ways any loss you might have suffered. That is how He works.

What does 1 John 3:22 teach us relative to this? This is most definitive in showing us our responsibilities relative to this thing called *faith*. First, we must keep God's commandments. This, of course, means that we must keep God's law as revealed in the Ten Commandments – which show us four (4) ways by which we are to love God supremely and six (6) ways by which we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Matthew 22:34-40 shows us that Jesus Christ taught that *all the law and the prophets* hang on these two commandments of loving God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. This is difficult for those who believe in *Covenant* and *Dispensational Theology*, which declare that God's law was done away with because of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – including the keeping of God's seventh-day Sabbath – supposedly because He *fulfilled* them. In some cases, it is taught that all prophecies not fulfilled by the first coming of Jesus Christ are simply null and void. Be careful about accepting the idea that Jesus Christ

changed any aspect of God's law and prophets (see Matthew 5:17-19).

In addition to that, we must “do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” This consists of all the good works that are not specifically named in the Ten Commandments, but are the natural outgrowth of our supreme love of God and our love of our neighbor *as ourselves*. Read 1 John 3:11-21 and understand the responsibility that people of genuine faith have toward their neighbor. It is not a love in *word* only; it is to be manifested in what we actually *do* for our fellowman. Ephesians 2:10 says that we have been created by God in Jesus Christ to perform good works that God has designed and destined for us to perform. This is consistent with James 2:14-26.

Let's look at James 4 to learn another important principle in understanding how faith proves the existence of things yet unseen. Our problems come upon us because of our misdirected desires and carnal cravings. When things don't come to us like we want them to, then we resort to force of some sort. This can be something as simple as misusing credit cards and getting into financial trouble – or, as radical as going to war on one level or another. When we resort to prayer and ask God to bless us in one way or another, it is done more to try to get Him to bail us out of something we got into (and with the intention of opening up another avenue by which we can continue to pursue our carnal cravings) than to surrender ourselves to Him. We continue to be like the world and less like God, yet we want *Him* to bail us out of our messes. Unless and until we learn that God resists this kind of approach to life, we will never be able to understand God's thoughts, ways, wisdom, and His solutions to our problems. How do we find the solution to this predicament?

We must understand the function of the Holy Spirit that God makes available to His people. We must humble ourselves before God and learn to resist the Devil. We must confess our

sins (see 5:16), clean up our lives, and quit dividing our loyalties between God and the world. We must quit planning our lives according to what *we say we are going to accomplish* – with no concern about what *God* might want to accomplish in us or through us. We must set aside our boastful, self-sufficient attitudes and learn to depend on God for the more perfect way of life and the blessings that go with it.

Hebrews 10:1 says that the law has a *shadow* of good things to come. Colossians 2:16, 17 says essentially the same thing. If that is true, then obeying God’s law and observing those things He has laid out in it should give the True Christian a *foretaste* of the redeemed life. God’s gift of the Holy Spirit begins to bring to you godly wisdom, truth, love, understanding, and knowledge. This, in turn, bolsters the faith that God is active and working in your life to bring you to the promised *salvation* – the *new birth (redemption)*.

When that comes upon you...when you realize that God Himself is interested in you and the outcome of your existence...when your life *works* for your good and not for your ill, then you begin to understand that there is a Force/Power that is active in your life that cannot be explained away by *your* thoughts and deeds. Then you begin to understand Paul’s statement in Romans 8:28: “*All things [even the bad things] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (emphasis added). The unseen things begin to become more and more real to you because you understand that if God does these smaller things, as other types of *security deposits* (shadows/foreshadows), then He will perform the greater things that are yet unseen. This proper, genuine, absolutely certain *faith* is the *guarantee* that it will be done. Without it, *there is no guarantee* – simply because without it *you* won’t be there to see it fulfilled. You won’t have had the “eyes to see and ears to hear” that are so necessary for discerning the things of God – the means by which this

genuine, absolutely certain faith is acquired and made to grow.

God does not wave a magic wand to give you faith so that you mystically and magically become spiritually minded in the face of difficult situations. Faith is not a commodity traded back and forth as situations demand. The individual *builds* faith because of the relationship he *builds* with God through the everyday experiences in His way of life. As God reveals the value of His way of life through the situations we face, we build *experience* and *personal knowledge* of His thoughts and ways.

If faith comes as a *gift*, then it comes as a result of our having been afforded opportunities by God to put Him to the test. For instance: you pray for *patience*, but you suddenly find yourself in situations that demand patience. You have to exercise patience in order to become more patient. You do not get *zapped* by a load of God-magic and mystically and magically suddenly become patient! *Your loyalty – your faith and allegiance – to God is **built** because of the personal experiences you have with God as you **actively live a life of righteousness** as God has revealed it to you by various means.*

It is important to understand that faith comes from hearing and reading the word of God and having God reveal Himself to you as an active presence in your life. Faith also comes from *experiencing* this active presence in the day-to-day activities of life – good and bad. *Faith toward God* is an active, outgoing concern for humanity in loving service and spreading this good news to others (1 John 2:9-11; James 2:14-26). When we understand this, then we can understand Ephesians 2:8 better. Such a faith *initiates* the grace of God toward the individual's salvation.

Take this a step further. In a life where sin is the ruler, you have had God's plan for mankind revealed to you through God's word and through preaching. You have had the significance of the necessity of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ revealed

to you. You have had the necessity of having your very being changed through spiritual conversion so that you can achieve God's purpose and glory. Because of all of this, you have exercised your *freedom of choice* to deliberately believe God and change your life in order to be part of that. At this point, God has a predetermined plan about what He will do if that scenario exists in your life. It is a gracious plan because He is not bound by any law to give you anything in particular.

As postulated elsewhere, He could have chosen to give you a gold Cadillac – or personal beauty. He could have settled on giving you a wild party – or a bag of *spoofum dust* to throw around so you could get what you want when you want it. He could have added 10, 100, or 1,000 years to your life. **But**, He *chose* to give you “salvation” – “redemption” – “new birth.” When He chose to do this, *no human even existed*. So, it was not because of anything *anyone* had done or could do to earn it or deserve it. He *chose* to give it because He is a loving and gracious God who wants the very best for His creation – to add humankind to His very own family (read Hebrews 2, Ephesians 1, and Romans 8:18, 19). Never in eternity could anyone have done enough to achieve this for himself or to deserve it. The *grace*, the *faith*, and the *salvation* are all God's gift to those who are willing to diligently seek Him.

Can you see that plan as a future occurrence? Can you embrace it as God's revealed truth? Can you refuse to cling to this present, evil world so that you can be counted as worthy of receiving it? God has *revealed* so much about Himself and His plan. Will you accept His *guarantee* and *proof by faith*?

– Eight –

How Do We Get There From Here?

Up to this point, the individual's role as a free moral agent has been discussed. It is necessary to understand how important the process of *personal choice* is in matters relating to salvation. We must not make the mistake of thinking that God *gives* us anything that we do not want or ask for in one way or another. The question that will inevitably come up is the one with which we began this study: "What must I do to be saved?" The question strongly stresses the necessity of personal action regarding one's salvation.

Here is where we discuss one of God's profound revelations of truth about how we get there from here. Please read this carefully because it is somewhat *paradoxical* – that is, it seems contrary to common sense, yet it is true. Paul's letters to Timothy were *pastoral* – essentially teaching Timothy how to

rightly give spiritual guidance to a congregation of God's people. In the latter part of 2 Timothy 2:25, he reasons that Timothy should do all the things he has discussed "if God peradventure will *give them repentance* to the acknowledging of the truth" (emphasis added). If you are not careful, you might get the idea that repentance does not come until God grants it – that repentance itself is also a gift of God. This makes it sound as if the action, choice, and decision are all up to God and not the individual. When the person has been *zapped* with repentance, he, through no choice on his own part, will fall obediently to his knees like an automaton and utter his God-given repentance – as opposed to having his need *revealed* to him and him making his choice based on that revelation. How, exactly, does this work?

The term *repentance* comes from the Greek term *metanoia*, which means "to have a change in purpose." Various, it means to have a change of mind, with sorrow for something wrongly done, and a wish that it was undone (see Matthew 27:3-5). But, our actions and words, once expressed, cannot be undone. It's like the question of how one can *unring* a bell. There might be a *remedy* for the action, but the action itself cannot be undone. Esau found no kind of change of mind in Isaac about the birthright blessing going to Jacob, even though Esau sought it with tears (Hebrews 12:7). God is sometimes said to *repent* of something He had done or was about to do (see Genesis 6:6 and Exodus 32:12). The true gospel repentance is deep sorrow for sin (Isaiah 66:1, 2).

We can also translate 2 Timothy 2:25 as follows: "It may be that God will *enable* them to repent," or "God may give them a change of mind." The implication is that God will provide a means by which the individual will be awakened to the need to repent. Once that awareness comes, the individual has the personal responsibility to yield himself to the change that is necessary for him to continue in the direction God's Spirit would

lead him. As Philippians 2:13 puts it: “It is God, for His own loving purpose, who puts the will and power into you.” How does He do that? By giving to you the Holy Spirit. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6 to “stir up the gift God gave you when I laid hands on you.” What *gift* was that? The Holy Spirit. Peter says in 2 Peter 1:13 that it was his duty to “keep stirring up in you *reminders* of the truth” (emphasis added). In 2 Peter 3:1, he says: “I stir your understanding of the truth *by giving you reminders*” (emphasis added). Romans 2:4 asks: “Are you abusing His abundant goodness, patience, and toleration, not realizing that this goodness of God is meant to lead you to repentance?”

All of the reminders and the stirring of the person’s spirit by the Holy Spirit of God are for the purpose of keeping in the forefront of the individual’s mind that *changing* from the *carnal mind* to the *spiritual mind* is vitally necessary. In the final analysis, however, the only one who controls whether or not that change comes is the individual. If he chooses not to allow the conversion to take place, *it will not take place*.

So, the necessity of repentance is stirred up by God’s Holy Spirit. It comes by reminders and further revelation of God’s truth about what *truth* is, about what *righteousness* is, about what *the right course of action* is. That is part of God’s continual *drawing* of an individual to Himself. He provides for the individual the *experiences* on which he can base his decisions and choices. In giving the individual these experiences, God is justified in saying: “I have set before you life and death; therefore, choose life and live. If you do not choose life, you automatically choose death because there is no limbo or neutral ground” (see Deuteronomy 28; 30:15-20).

Since repentance is made up of all of these experiences God lays out, repentance would, of necessity, be a *process*. It, like conversion, *begins* at a specific point in time, but it is a lifelong experience of recognizing the mistakes and correcting them (1

John 1:8-10; 2:1,2) – with God providing us with reminders and stirring the Holy Spirit in us to guide us out of them into His truth.

In describing repentance as sorrow, it is necessary to understand real repentance as opposed to worldly sorrow. Paul describes it this way in 2 Corinthians 7:10: “For godly sorrow [that is, *true repentance*] works repentance to salvation with no regrets; but the sorrow of the world brings death.” Godly sorrow produces true repentance, which produces a life that, because it has changed its purpose, demonstrates that change by its godly deeds. Action is taken to mend any breaches between oneself and God, as well as between oneself and his fellowman. Sin is hated, and the kind of mind that perpetuates it is abhorred.

Worldly sorrow is the kind of sorrow that is more upset at getting caught than at doing the misdeed. You often see this in public figures who say or do something wrong and blame it on a wrong understanding by the public of his real intentions – kind of like a television show host’s comments about a politician’s 14-year-old daughter supposedly getting “knocked up” by a famous baseball player during the seventh inning of a baseball game. He apologized more for the “bad joke” than he did for the stupidity and crass insensitivity he displayed by telling it. He never did apologize to the baseball player for putting him in a joke where he “knocked up” a 14-year-old girl – which would have constituted statutory rape!

Worldly sorrow manifests itself in a resentment toward or a fear of the punishment that will follow. It also shows no real concern for the hurt and sorrow others have to endure because of the misdeed. The renowned Christian apologist C. S. Lewis once pondered the prayer of the penitent who asks for the forgiveness of his sins. He pondered the sins that were committed by others as a result of that penitent’s influential sin. How do you remedy them by asking only that *your* sin be for-

given? Surely the *ripple effect* of our sins must be important to us when we express our sorrow before God! The worldly sorrow would allow the offending individual to commit the misdeed again and again if there were a chance of escaping the consequences because *he does not actually hate the sin!*

After one's initial conversion, this godly sorrow – this righteous abhorrence of sin – is supposed to be active in the individual (Romans 12:9). It is inconceivable that such a sorrow that is needed to initiate conversion would cease to function – that it would cease to affect the continued conversion process throughout one's life. When one begins to foster in his being a godly sorrow for his personal sins and the *ripple effect* they have upon others, a change is about to take place that will profoundly affect the outcome of that individual's life. You must be aware of the opportunities laid before you to either change or to quench the Spirit of God working in you to bring you to salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Then what?

Act 2:38 says that our repentance should result in two things: baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit [Lessons Eight and Nine in our Bible Study Course cover these topics in detail]. Both are *required* for salvation. Have you taken the time to evaluate your own life – your need for repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit? If not, I'll be glad to discuss the matter with you. That's part of the process of getting *there* from where you are.

A Brief Overview of God’s Plan of Salvation

One should properly understand what God has revealed as being His plan of salvation – not just the process by which it is acquired, but also the reward(s) that are involved. After all, if your *faith* is misplaced, then you stand a chance of never acquiring what God has promised. I am continually amazed by those who lustily sing the hymn “Standing on the Promises,” which lists the quality of those promises very prominently: (a) their inability to fail, (b) their being bound to God by love’s strong cord, and (c) the believer’s inability to fail when following the guidance of God’s Spirit. These are marvelous qualities of God’s great and precious promises! *But, what if you think those promises consist of something that God never promised? What then? What does God think of your inability to *correctly* understand His truth? How will you fare*

in the eternity ahead? It would be in our best interest to get a brief overview of this matter so that we can more perfectly praise God for what He has planned for us.

All of God's promises for the Christian are bound up in what the Lord God of the Old Testament covenanted with Abraham by *promise* and *oath*. Just so we do not get lined up in the cross-hairs of those who believe in *Covenant Theology* and *Dispensational Theology*, I will take God's revelation from New Testament scriptures to satisfy those who, although with some measure of misunderstanding, consider themselves to be *New Testament Christians*. There is nothing wrong with believing yourself to be a New Testament Christian – you just need to properly understand what that means.

There is an interesting account in Acts 3 that brings up part of God's revelation. Peter and John, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have healed a man who was born lame. Immediately afterwards, Peter launches into a sermon about Jesus Christ and how they ignorantly crucified Him. Peter uses two interesting expressions in verses 18-21: (a) *times of refreshing* and (b) *times of restitution of all things*. What is the context of these remarks? Verse 18: "Those things, which God [has proclaimed] by the mouths of all His prophets, **that Christ should suffer**, He has fulfilled." What things were these? In this case, Peter is speaking specifically of the *suffering* and *crucifixion* of Jesus Christ. *He is not saying that all things prophesied by all of God's prophets were fulfilled in Jesus Christ at His crucifixion*. We should know that many prophecies have yet to be fulfilled. Based on that prophesied suffering and crucifixion, people should repent and be converted. Why? So their sins can be blotted out "*when the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord*." Then, Peter tells them that Christ was to be in heaven "*until the times of restitution of all things*." What do these two expressions mean?

Refreshing is translated from the Greek term *anapsuxis*,

which means “breathing space, relaxation, relief.” Figuratively speaking, it means a “time of rest” like that brought about by the Messianic age – which is revealed in Revelation 20 to be a 1,000-year Kingdom on earth and in Hebrews 4 as a *Sabbath rest* that God’s people should work toward entering. This discussion in Hebrews 4 is prefaced by comments made in Hebrews 3:8-11 where Paul discusses the rebellious attitudes of ancient Israel as the Lord God was leading them *to the Promised Land*. Verse 11 is interesting: “I swore in my wrath that they would not enter into *my rest*” (emphasis added). This is not only a *physical rest*; it is also a *place of rest*. The Promised Land is a *place of rest*. Hebrews 4 makes the point that there is not only a *physical rest* in the future for God’s people, there is also a *place of rest* for them to enter. The return of Jesus Christ will inaugurate the *physical rest* in a specific *place of rest*. So, *times of refreshing* refers specifically to the coming Messianic age embodied in the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Restitution is translated from the Greek term *apokatastasis*, which means “restoration.” There is discussion about whether or not this term means “to establish something as predicted” or “to restore to an earlier condition.” Peter pretty much demonstrates that God’s prophets have predicted the *establishment* of this time of refreshing. But, can it be demonstrated that it also has something to do with *restoring something to a previous condition*? Oddly enough, *yes*. Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich show in their Greek-English lexicon that the expression can be variously understood to mean “*restoring everything* to perfection” (p. 92). What does this mean? It means that *everything* is going to be renewed, repaired, reconciled, and returned to its original condition – providing, of course, *everything* is reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:10, 11 reveals two things that relate to this discussion: (a) Jesus Christ is going to *unite all things in heaven and earth* (RSV), and (b) we have an inheritance in Jesus Christ

that is part and parcel to this union of all things. This relates directly to Genesis 1 and Romans 8:19-23. God's creation of heaven and earth was *perfect*. There was no sin and death. It was habitable, and man, animals, and their environment were in perfect harmony. Paul reveals in Romans 8:19-23 that *the whole creation* (*Modern Language, Living Bible, RSV, and others*) has been subjected by God to decay and futility because of sin – *it's in bondage to corruption* (*KJV*).

Jesus Christ is going to remedy that state-of-being when He returns to institute God's *rest* and *restoration of all things*. Make note that the *earth* is one of the focal points in that *restoration to perfection*. Why would God do that if He has promised Christians *heaven* as the reward of salvation? Why restore the entire physical universe, including the earth, to *perfection* if *heaven* is the only place the saved will ever inhabit? Why go to all that trouble?

So, humans are not the only thing that will be "saved." All of creation, as Paul says, "eagerly awaits the manifestation of the sons of God." Why? Because, when Jesus Christ returns and changes the first group of humans from flesh to spirit, He will begin a process of *salvation* that will reconcile *all things* to God. It is shown in Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 that there is: (a) an *order* to resurrections from the dead – *first* being an ordinal number, (b) Christ's reign on earth will last as long as it takes for Him to put all of God's enemies into subjection to God – some, like death, being completely destroyed, and (c) Christ will have subjected all things to God the Father when He has completed His assignment and returns to the Father the authority He gave to Him. So, this bringing of order, rest, peace, repair, and restoration to perfection is all part of God's plan of salvation. ***It is not simply taking believers to heaven when they die! It is not taking believers to heaven at all! When God put all things under the authority of Jesus Christ, it included the vast universe and everything in it!***

Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5-18 show two things: (a) God has a plan by which *all things* are to be put under the feet of mankind, and (b) this will be accomplished through Jesus Christ when He brings mankind into the very *family of God* (see also Ephesians 1:4-14). This was exactly what Elohim intended when They planned to create mankind in Their image (Genesis 1:26). While the initial plan was to put all things *on the earth* under the control of *fleshly* mankind, once they were changed into the very spirit-image of Elohim, there would be no barriers to their inheriting the vast universe *for eternity*. *Eternal life* will allow them to occupy all of the universe and to carry out continuing creative acts wherever God sends them.

This is the thrust of the statement in Isaiah 9:7 that says that “the increase of His government **will know no end.**” That plan was postponed when Eve took and ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. God has allowed the results of that act to demonstrate to mankind that they cannot properly rule with that kind of knowledge. This is part and parcel to Paul’s comments in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 that God “gave them over to” the results of their sins and false religion. It, too, has had a way of putting all things into the bondage of corruption. Almost 6,000 years of human history has proved that to be true.

Now look at Hebrews 6:13-20. The basic idea here is that God made promises to Abraham in which the *Christian* should place his unflinching hope, trust, and faith. Abraham obtained the promises that God made *irrevocable* by His *promise* and *oath*. Furthermore, they *cannot be changed*. In other words, God cannot come along later and say: “Oh, by the way, I’m going to substitute this for the promises I made to Abraham.” If God promised Abraham certain territory on the earth (read Genesis 12:1-7 and 15:7-21), He *cannot* – based on His *promise* and *oath* – come along later and substitute *heaven* for that territory. Or, as some have taught, give Old Testament believers the earth and New Testament Christians heaven. When Paul uses the

pronoun *we* in vv. 18, 19, he is speaking of the *heirs of promise* mentioned in v. 17 to whom God is demonstrating the *unchanging* nature of His *counsel* (the Greek term *boule* means His *will, purpose, and resolve*). Don't get sidetracked by what the traditional teaching has led you to believe! You are responsible for living according to and believing in God's revealed *will and truth* (see Matthew 7:21-23). And...we have already seen what Abraham had faith in and what he expected.

Let's "string" some "pearls" – a rabbinic practice of putting several related scriptures together to form a picture or truth. I have already been doing that, but let's continue in that vein. Romans 4:13 says that Abraham was promised the *earth* – the Greek term *kosmos* means, in this case, "the earth." Many in Traditional Christianity have taught *for centuries*, based on very flimsy proof from scriptures, that the reward of the "saved" is *heaven*. How does this promise to Abraham relate to *Christians*? Read the rest of the chapter to see how Paul recommends the faith exercised by Abraham to *Christians*. He points out the *absolute faith* of Abraham, not only in the promise that he will inherit the earth, but that his 90-year-old wife would have a son who would be the heir of that promise.

In Romans 8:14-17, he shows that Christians imbued with the Holy Spirit are *children of God* and, therefore, will *inherit* whatever Jesus Himself will inherit. Now, ask yourself: Is Jesus' inheritance *different* from Abraham's inheritance? If it is, then we must have that discussion. If it is not, then we must determine what Abraham and Jesus have in common – and how that affects the inheritance of the Christian. Hebrews 11 is a discussion about people of *faith* from Abel to Paul's time. *Faith*, in this case, describes a group of people who *looked forward to the coming of the Christ – the Delivering Seed* (see Genesis 3:15). In effect, they were *Christians*. Paul explains in vv. 39, 40 that *these believers* will receive their reward *at the same time we* will receive ours – not before; not after.

Now, the *coup de maitre* (the masterstroke: a masterly performance or move): Galatians 3. Paul resorts to a discussion of Abraham's faith and what God meant when He told Abraham that all nations would be blessed in him (see Genesis 12:1-3). He very deftly connects *Christians* with the faith of Abraham in v. 9: "They which be of *faith* are ***blessed*** with *faithful Abraham*" (emphasis added) In v. 14, he includes the Gentiles in the blessing of Abraham. He had already said in v. 7 that "they who are of *faith* [we know that *faith* is not only in the promises made, but also in the *salvation* to be provided by his *Seed* de-scribed in v. 16] are the children of Abraham." He also explains how the inheritance is a matter of promise, not some-thing demanded by God's law. God's law is a teacher that leads us to faith in Christ. Now, the *coup de maitre* in vv. 26-29 (read this carefully):

You are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ***If you are Christ's*** [if you are a *true Christian*], ***then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*** (emphases added)

Any way you "slice it," Paul is telling true Christians that their inheritance with Abraham is ***the earth*** – *not heaven*. All of this is part and parcel to the *salvation* God is bringing through Jesus Christ – which includes the rest, peace, repair, and restoration to perfection He will effect as King of kings and Lord of lords. In effect, it ultimately means inheriting the ***entire universe*** (see Revelation 21:7)!

- Ten -

The Restitution of All Things

*** This chapter is a reprint of Chapter Nine
in *Meat in Due Season*. ***

In Acts 3, the Apostles Peter and John had just healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate in the Temple and astounded many 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 all 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 created 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*. When and why did God do this?

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).

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 and counterfeit Christianity; (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 will 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 comes 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 left 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; Revelation 17 and 19); and (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 tithing 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.

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's 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 (John 14:2-4), 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.

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 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; emphasis added). 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” (emphases added). 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).

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" (emphases added). 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.

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* population of "the *survivors* from *all the nations* that attacked Jerusalem" in the final conflict against Jesus Christ and the saints – sometimes called the battle of Armageddon (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 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58)! 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; emphases added). 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 having to punish 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 who 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 *unlearn* 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).

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” (1 Corinthians 10:31). 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? No!

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 a thing, 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 promises us perpetual joy if we will 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.

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 mold 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 are 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; emphasis added).

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 will 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.

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 1 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*” (emphases added).

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?

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 fulness 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 all the 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, wars, 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.

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, earthly Kingdom 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 a *record* of His word if we can merely deny its true significance? It is less than honest to spiritualize away these most important messages from the Lord God.

May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you seek His Kingdom and His righteousness *first* in all you do (Matthew 6:33).

Postscript

We come back full-circle to our original query: Is calling on the name of Jesus Christ all there is to being *saved*? No. You must express a certain kind of faith by living a certain way. You must have faith in specific things that God has revealed. You must change the way you think and live. You must continually examine your life and get rid of the ungodly things that would shipwreck your progress toward salvation. You must develop genuine certainty and hope in God's plan for humanity without doubting or shrinking away from it in disbelief. There are things to learn and things to do. *A simple belief in Jesus Christ or a simple naming of His name upon your lips is not enough.* There is more to salvation than meets the eye. May the God of Truth bless you with "eyes that see and ears that hear" as you seek to understand His revealed truth.

In Christ's Service,

Larry E. Ford, Pastor
The Seventh Day Christian Assembly
tsdca@hughes.net