

FROM GLORY TO GLORY

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL

by

DAVID W. DYER

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*Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from
the New King James version of the Bible.*

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*“But we all, with unveiled face,
beholding as in a mirror
the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed
into the same image
from glory to glory,
just as by
the Spirit of the Lord.”*

II CORINTHIANS 3:18

PREFACE

God is invisible. He is a God who hides Himself (Is 45:15). Therefore, the only way we can know Him is when He reveals Himself in some way to us. Consequently, our relationship with Him is completely dependent upon revelation. The more He shows us about Who and what He is, the more we can know and appreciate Him.

Without such spiritual understanding, we can only speculate about what He may be like and form a kind of mental picture of His person. To have true intimacy with God and to walk in His presence requires supernatural revelation.

If we desire to walk with God and cooperate with Him in His works upon the earth, it is necessary to have this spiritual revelation. Moses, before he began to build the tabernacle, the "dwelling place" of God, spent forty days and nights in His presence.

There He received much revelation about who God is and what it is that He desires. In the same way too, if we want to be co-workers together with Jesus for the sake of His kingdom, we must spend much time in His presence receiving divine revelation.

It is the intention of this author, therefore, to convey in as clear a manner as possible a small part of this wonderful revelation. It is his earnest prayer that this writing would be used by our Lord to reveal Himself in a clearer and more full way to each and every reader.

D.W.D.

1.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Why did God create man? This is an important question which needs to be answered by those seeking to better understand their Creator and their relationship to Him. The responses most often given usually include such thoughts as: "Man was created for God's glory," or "Man was made to worship and glorify God."

While such explanations certainly contain truth, they fall quite short of really pinpointing God's ultimate design. They fail to penetrate the depths of Biblical revelation and to provide a framework which is meaningful to us individually. Such answers tend to convey a general, impersonal impression concerning God's intentions for man. But I believe that the God whom the Scriptures reveal has in His heart a plan of far more intimate, personal relevance than most of us have ever imagined. He is a God of love.

The message contained in this chapter has been and still is very difficult for me to write. In fact, I have tried many times over the years to address this subject on paper but ended by only feeling inadequate. It is a subject about which I have preached more than any other. But at the end of every message, I inevitably feel that I did not do proper justice to this tremendous theme.

It is so deep and so profound that mere human expression is not sufficient. Perhaps the truth is that the love of God is truly unfathomable. It is something which no human being could ever fully express. Nevertheless, the importance of the revelation of God's love for each and

every believer is so great, so central to our experience of Christianity as He meant it to be, that I feel I must at least try to put some of my small understanding about this vast subject in writing.

May God in His mercy grant an anointing and spirit of revelation on this writing so that it could be a vehicle to transport you into the fullness of God's love.

The Bible is an incomparable book. There has never been and there will never be another book like it. In fact, it would be impossible for any human being or even a group of human beings to write such a book. Only God could have done it. The complexity of the Bible, the intricacy and interweaving of the plots and story line, combined with the amazing accuracy and detail contained in it, place it far above any other work which has been written.

When you add to all these considerations the fact that this book was not penned by one man at one time but by many different men over a period of thousands of years, its extraordinary character is even more evident. Any honest reader of this book will eventually be brought to his knees in worshipful awe of God Almighty.

As with many great pieces of literature, in the beginning of this marvelous book we find a few of what could be thought of as "seeds" – the first small introductions to all that will be taking place in the rest of its pages. The book of Genesis is not simply an interesting story or a fabled account of the early history of man.

Instead, in the first few chapters of the Bible we find in very concentrated form, the essence of what God will be speaking to us throughout. In the first few pages of this book, the beginnings of all of God's intentions are manifested. Therefore, it seems important for us as we begin our investigation of God's purposes to look very carefully at the first several chapters of the Bible.

A MOMENTOUS DECISION

Shortly after the creation of this world, the God of glory held a solemn conference with Himself. Following this awesome consultation, He made the following pro-

nouncement: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen 1:26).

This is a very significant pronouncement. The creator of the universe decided to fashion a being which resembled Himself. Now why did God do something like this? Why would He make a creature which could be described as a miniature representation of Himself?

Surely we must conclude that it was more than just a passing fancy but that our God had a glorious purpose in His mind.

Man was not an experiment, an afterthought, or simply a new kind of creature which God invented to populate the earth. Instead, when He formed man, God was setting in motion an unfathomable plan which emanated from the depths of His heart.

Consequently, man is a unique creature in the Almighty's design. He was the only being created with this great privilege of being made in the image and likeness of the Most High God. Truly we are "...fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14).

God began His creation of the human race with a single individual, Adam. However, as He contemplated His creation – most of which He had earlier pronounced "very good" (Gen 1:31) – He noticed that something was missing. His attention was focused upon one lacking element which He evidently considered to be a very important deficiency – Adam had no wife.

It was in this context that God uttered some words which are especially important and which I believe reveal to us something about His own heart. He said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18).

Why would God do such a thing? Why did He go to all the effort to create Adam and then as soon as the work was done, pronounce it inadequate? An incident like this must be more than coincidental.

It seems possible that when He spoke this sentence about the first man, He was echoing a longing which He felt deep within His own heart. Could it be that our God does not enjoy being alone? Could it be that He desires an

intimate union with a being like Himself? Could we possibly understand from this eloquent picture that perhaps our King intends to be married?

The answer to these questions is undoubtedly, YES! Beyond a doubt, God is speaking to us through this passage about something which is deeply upon His own heart. Keeping this thought in mind, let us examine more of the scriptures together and see how they indeed do support such a hypothesis.

THE SEARCH FOR A BRIDE

Shortly after making the first man, God declared His work incomplete and then set about "building" a bride for Adam. However, instead of immediately commencing this work, He did a most unusual thing. He first brought all the animals before Adam's gaze, and Adam named them. "But," we read, "there was not found a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:20).

What an interesting statement this is! It sounds as if God was not merely requiring Adam to name animals as a little duty before his wedding but, far more importantly, He was looking for a suitable helper for him. He and Adam together were examining all these birds and beasts in search of a proper mate. However, none could be found.

Of course, I'm sure that many of these creatures were very agreeable. I imagine that some appeared quite cute, cuddly, and furry. But somehow something was not right. None of them could stir a response within this man. So, as we have already discussed, God set to work to remedy the situation.

Afterwards when Adam awoke he was presented with a beautiful sight. The woman whom God had made was standing before him. As he gazed upon her with delight, something stirred in the deepest recesses of his heart. Something within his breast responded to this new creature.

Then this powerful feeling which he had never felt before found expression in the words: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). She was just

like himself. What all of the creatures could never be to him, this woman was. Here he had found a proper counterpart with whom he could join in intimate union.

Now all this does have an extremely important application to our present discussion about God and His intentions. You see, even though He is surrounded by myriads of angels, even though His whole creation lies before Him, none of these other creatures are adequate to provide the intimacy and companionship He desires. None of them can fill this position because they are not similar to Himself.

Just as Adam could not find a mate among any of the animals but had to wait until God prepared a wife for him, so, too, our Lord is looking for a "someone" – His future bride – of whom He could say, "She is like me, 'bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.'"

Dear friends, this is far more than just a lesson in ancient history. Rather, here we find an eloquent, prophetic illustration of an important spiritual principle. God's design for the universe is that only creatures which are similar can mate or marry.

Only beings which are alike are permitted to have this kind of intimate union. Birds mate with birds, cattle with cattle, fish with fish, and so forth – each one after its own kind (Gen 1:21,24). This truth is clearly seen in the illustration we have just reviewed as well as commanded by the scriptures (Lev 20:15,16). It is against God's law for dissimilar creatures to mate.

Therefore, in accordance with His own law, God can only join in intimate union with a being like Himself. In order for Him to marry, He must find a being who is His counterpart. Many of the details contained in the first pages of Genesis confirm this supposition that God indeed does have and has had from the very beginning a burning desire for an intimate companion.

It may be easy for the casual reader to overlook these items as being insignificant. However, here in the first few chapters of Genesis are revealed some substantial, clear indications of all God's future intentions concerning man.

TWO "PARALLEL" WEDDINGS

In the beginning of the Bible, we encounter the original wedding. The first man Adam finds and marries a beautiful woman, who was specially constructed by God for him. And if we read through to the end of the story, we will discover that the Bible also ends with a wedding. Jesus Christ, the "last Adam," receives a bride which has been especially prepared for Him.

Now in the scriptural record there are many parallels between these two marriages. In fact, these parallels are so striking that I am forced to conclude that the Genesis account must be considered strongly prophetic. God, when introducing His book, placed in the first few pages a holy prophecy which is even now being fulfilled in His people.

We have already examined part of this prophecy concerning Adam and the creation of Eve. But as we look further, we discover even more wonderful indications of God's design. We should notice that God caused "a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" – a death-like state in which God's work upon him was done (Gen 2:21).

While he was in this condition, an incision was made in his side and God removed something (our translations say it was a rib). Then from this part of Adam, God "built" (Hebrew) a woman for him. In a similar way our Lord Jesus entered into death for us on the cross. There, His side was also pierced and something came out of that side – "blood and water" (Jn 19:34). It is with this eternal substance which flowed from the side of our Savior that God is "building" (Mt 16:18) the bride of Christ, the eternal "woman" who will dwell with Him forever.

As we begin to read the first few pages of the Book, we encounter a wonderful garden. This garden was the scene of the first wedding. Out of this garden is flowing a river and in the middle of the garden grows a tree called "the tree of life" (Gen 2:9). Additionally the text mentions that in this land there is an abundant supply of gold, something called "bdellium," and onyx stone (Gen 2:11,12).

At the end of the book, in the account of Revelation, something of great splendor and glory is described. It is a city which is a participant in the last and most glorious wedding of the universe. Yet we notice that this city contains many of the same elements as are found in the garden.

Where we once read of gold buried in the ground in Eden, we now are shown an entire city radiating golden splendor and having its street paved with the same substance. The onyx stones described in the garden can now be seen along with many other precious stones, polished, perfected, and decorating a glorious wall surrounding the entire structure. This adornment – “all manner of precious stones” (Rev 21:19,20) – is symbolic of all true believers in their transformed, glorified state.

In the New Jerusalem there is also a river. This one is a river of crystal clear “water of life,” which gushes out from underneath the throne of God and the Lamb. That river, perhaps spiritually related to the one which we saw in the beginning, is now available for “whosoever will” to come and drink. It is here representative of the life of God Himself to whom we can come and be satisfied.

Not only this but the tree of life which appears so singularly in the beginning is now growing abundantly on both sides of the river with its twelve crops (one crop each month) of fruit freely available to everyone. Even the leaves of this tree are important: they are for serving the nations.

Now let us not forget the “bdellium.” This word is encountered in chapter 2, verse 12. No doubt, many have read this word here in this verse, but what is it? If you don’t know, then you are in good company. Even Bible scholars and translators don’t really know. In fact, the meaning is so obscure that they have borrowed this Latin word “bdellium” instead of making an English translation.

One of the best ways to determine a word’s meaning is to discover how it is used elsewhere in the Bible. So we can use this method to help us with our inquiry. The only other place where this word appears is in connection with

the “heavenly bread,” manna, which is described as being small, white, and round (Ex 16:14,31), and “the color of bdellium” (Num 11:7). Therefore, I would like to suggest that this word bdellium could be referring to what we know today as pearl – something small, white, and round.

In fact, two ancient manuscripts do use the word “pearl” in place of bdellium. So, since Biblical scholars do not really know what this substance is and since, as you will soon see, this translation harmonizes so well with other parts of God’s word, I think that it could be acceptable to adopt this meaning.

THE GATES OF PEARL

Looking again at the New Jerusalem, we find that each of its twelve gates is composed of a single large pearl. Do you know how a pearl is formed? It begins when a grain of sand or some other small irritating object gets into the shell of an oyster. As this irritation increases, the oyster begins to secrete a juice from its side which surrounds the offending object with a layer of smooth, precious, pearly substance. Out of a wound comes something of great value.

Surely such an illustration is pointing us to the Savior. When His side was pierced, a substance came out which has provided a “gateway” for us – our entrance into that eternal city. He is the “Pearl of great price” (Mt 13:46).

So you see that all the raw materials about which we read in the scene of the first wedding have, by the end of the book, been prepared and built up into a glorious setting for an eternal wedding – the wedding of God’s own Son. While in the beginning we are shown a man receiving his wife in the midst of a garden, at the end it is God’s people who are participants in that indescribably holy event: the marriage of the Lamb. In fact, the city itself is described as a bride adorned for her Husband (Rev 21:2).

The beginning and ending of this book, though written hundreds of years apart, are thus seen in unsurpassed harmony which could only come from God Himself. Now, after considering all this, don’t you also believe that God has been desiring this from the beginning? Don’t you see

beautifully depicted here an illustration of God's heart's desire? All these parallels from the beginning and end of the scriptures cannot be an accident. Surely they must be speaking to us something of eternal consequence and importance. God is revealing to us His heart's desire.

In the creation of man we can also find further support for this understanding. Since man was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), it is not unreasonable to suppose that to some degree our inner feelings reflect those of our Maker. And one of the most powerful desires within a man or woman is to be married to someone they deeply love. Therefore, love and the desire for intimate companionship cannot be very far from the heart of God.

When we read in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world," what do you think this love is like? Is it just some sort of paternal pity? Is it simply attributable to the fact that God feels sorry for us poor, sinful, little human beings whom He made and so has decided to rescue us?

Perhaps God's love includes such elements as these, but I believe that in God's love for the world is embodied something much more profound. For God so loved the world! The intensity of His love is beyond description. It is so much a part of His nature that in one passage of Scripture we read that "God is love" (I Jn 4:16).

I believe that you will see as we proceed through this book that this speaks of the love which He has for His bride. It is nothing less than God's desire for eternal companionship with someone like Himself.

When Jesus was with His disciples eating what we call "the last supper" He said: "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you" (Lk 22:15). Why was there such an intense desire within His breast to eat this simple meal with His friends? The answer no doubt lies in the thought that it was reminding Him of a future feast – a wedding feast which was coming. Jesus was looking forward to His wedding day, and there was a burning desire, a yearning within Him for His bride. This is why He had such an intense longing to sup there with His twelve disciples in preparation for all that was lying ahead.

THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

We read in another place that it was “for the joy that was set before Him” that He endured the cross (Heb 12:2). What was this joy set before Him? Was it simply the joy of entering into the glory of His Father? This does not seem to be an adequate explanation since He had already shared the glory of the Father before the world was created (Jn 17:5). No, it was something even greater, something even deeper, something even closer to His heart.

The joy set before Him was the joy of a man who is waiting to receive His bride. It is the joy of a man on his wedding day when he is getting married to the woman whom he loves. Jesus was looking into the future and beholding the one with whom He was to be joined in intimate union. It was this view, this joyful thought which spurred Him on to sacrifice Himself for us. In Isaiah 62:5 we read: “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”

What a wonderful day that will be when God’s redeemed and prepared people are built into one holy “woman” and prepared for that glorious wedding day. This is the joy which was set before Him and dear brothers and sisters it is also the joy which is set before us.

Oh that God would give us a vision and revelation of that wonderful wedding day and all that it entails – God and man joining in most holy union – so that we may run the race with joy! Hallelujah! Such a view will surely cause us to lay aside everything – all the weight and the sin which so easily besets us (Heb 12:1) – and pursue Him and His purposes with all our hearts.

Paul speaks concerning this future intimacy with our Creator when he says: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (I Cor 2:9). Then he goes on to qualify this by stating that God does indeed reveal these “deep things” (vs 10) to those who are intimate with Him. Our Lord is calling us into a love relationship with Himself.

This is a relationship which will culminate in a union with the Most High which can only be described in terms of marriage. These are not my terms but are the language of the Bible – words which God Himself chose to describe these things to us in a way we can understand.

Human marriage, with all the intimacy it entails, is something which has been created and sanctified by God. Within the covenant bonds of matrimony, almost nothing is proscribed by our Maker.

We have only to read the Song of Solomon to realize how God views this kind of relationship. This book is so personal and contains such graphic allusions to marital intimacy that many people – even believers – cannot read it without becoming uncomfortable. Evidently their flesh is too strong and therefore they are stimulated wrongly.

However, here in the Bible, God illustrates for us our future spiritual joys. He is using physical, human terms and describing the intense enjoyment of two married people, but there is no doubt in my mind that He is actually speaking about Himself and His bride.

Of course this book does have its application to our earthly marriages of this age, but many great saints of God who have gone before us including Hudson Taylor and Watchman Nee have seen here a prophetic word. Psalms 16:11 states: “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Another passage reads: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be” (I Jn 3:2). This verse used to trouble me because I could not envision a higher relationship with God than that of being one of His sons.

But the scriptures do speak of such a position. Today we are God’s sons and so we relate to Him on that basis. But someday, oh what a glorious day, we will enter into another kind of relationship with Him. Someday we will be His wife. Although a child may have a good deal of intimacy with his father, the wife enjoys a much deeper relationship. This may just be what the scriptures are speaking about when they mention something yet to be revealed.

A HOLY UNION WITH GOD

These words “bride” and “wife” convey thoughts of enjoyment and intimacy which might be misunderstood by the carnal mind. But I pray that as you read these words and meditate upon the scriptures concerning these things, God will unveil your eyes to this glorious truth. According to the unmistakably clear words of the Bible, God is calling His people into a holy union with Himself which can only be described as a marriage.

Surely this will not be a physical relationship as we have on earth, but instead, the physical intimacy which we have here is simply a picture of future spiritual joys.

Perhaps some readers will find it difficult to think of God as a future marriage partner. Instead, it is often easier to know Him as our Savior or Father. While these are, indeed, roles which God has in our lives, the position of being our future husband is certainly the most intimate.

Our God is a God of passionate love and this love is focused on us, mere human beings. The scriptures reveal to us the heart of God, and in His heart is a kind of divine romance, a fervent love for His future bride. Don't limit yourself merely to the way in which you have known Him in the past. Don't be afraid to open up to a greater revelation of His person and character. The God whom the Bible reveals is our own Lord and King. You can confidently believe that what His word reveals about Himself is true.

Not only does God have a passionate love toward us, but He is searching for those who will love Him in the same way. Do you remember the first commandment? “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37).

Does this sound like something impersonal and distant? Certainly not! Usually when someone loves another with such fervor we say that they are “in love.” Do you have this kind of relationship with God? Is He your first love? Or are you keeping Him at arm's length, trying to be satisfied with a kind of impersonal, “safe” sort of God who has very little to do with your inner, secret life?

Let us read together from the book of Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 16-19. Here Paul is praying for the brethren that they [and we also] would “be rooted and grounded in love.” And from this position “...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

You see, knowing the love of God is important. In fact, it is essential for us if we are going to enter into a deep, full, satisfying relationship with Him. When you know that someone loves you completely and thoroughly, then it is easy to open your heart to them, trusting that they will deal with what they find there in love. So it is with our relationship with God.

All believers need an intimate, open-hearted, nothing-secret relationship with Jesus. We must allow Him access to the innermost recesses of our being. There can be nothing hidden: nothing from the past, nothing which has happened to us. Nothing must be kept from His loving inspection and touch.

TOTAL TRUST

This kind of relationship is only possible when we have absolute confidence in the love of the Person to whom we are yielding ourselves. It is essential that we come to know the depths of God’s love. If not, we will only have a superficial, unsatisfying relationship with Him. He will never be able to penetrate to the core of our being and transform these parts into His image. When we have fears, inner barriers, walls, and resistances – this serves to show that we have not yet truly known the love of God. “He that fears has not been made perfect in love” (I Jn 4:18).

You may notice while reading in the book of Revelation that the bride of Christ is “clear as crystal” (Rev 21:11). This bride has nothing hidden, dark, or reserved. There are no secrets from her beloved. Her trust in Him enables her to be completely transparent, allowing Him access to all of her.

This is the kind of relationship which we must find with our Lord. It is a relationship of deepest love. It is an intimacy of the highest, purest kind which leads us into "all the fullness of God." The greatest need in our Christian lives is this: a passionate love relationship with God, leading to an intimacy with Him and resulting in transformation into the image of God.

I would like to repeat that the interrelationship between the first part of the Bible and the last is not a coincidence. This is not just a nice story. Instead, in these pages God is revealing tremendous things about Himself and His desires which He wants us to understand.

What a wonderful picture the book of Revelation gives us. All the seeds, all the hints which are portrayed for us in the book of Genesis have now reached fruition and fulfillment. The raw materials have been built up. The entire structure has been completed. All that God the Father set out to do in the beginning has been accomplished. There the man Christ Jesus is seen receiving His bride, that holy city New Jerusalem. She is coming down out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

God's holy book begins and ends with a wedding. What an incredible love story this is! Have you ever heard one to equal it? How tremendous the love of God for mankind must be to cause Him to begin to do all these things and then to overcome such tremendous obstacles to accomplish them.

How we need to see and sense within ourselves the yearning desire within the heart of God for mankind – the desire He expresses so clearly in Jeremiah where He says to His people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3). I believe that this kind of revelation will plant within our breast a similar yearning for our future husband that will cause us to make ourselves ready (Is 54:5). May we by His mercy be preparing ourselves until He comes.

2.

THE OFFER OF LIFE

*A*t the dawning of this present world, our God fashioned a being similar to Himself for His own holy purposes. Chief among these purposes, as we discussed in chapter one, is that He is seeking a bride. God is in the process of creating for Himself an eternal, intimate companion. Man, the object of God's attention and affection, is the one who was fashioned to fulfill this wonderful design.

Let us remember here, however, that in God's universe, only creatures who are similar can marry. Such intimacy is only permitted between beings who are the same. Therefore, in order for God's desires to be realized, man must qualify to participate in this union.

As we look closely at our first forefather with these thoughts in mind, some serious deficiencies become apparent. Adam, even before the fall, did not qualify to fulfill God's intentions. Although he resembled God in many ways, it is also clear that he was not exactly the same kind of being as God.

As we meditate upon this, one problem which becomes apparent is that God and man did not have the same kind of life. Therefore, they could not be considered the same kind of being. Although the life which Adam and Eve possessed was initially good and never ending, it still was only a created, human variety.

In contrast to this, their Maker's life was the supernatural, uncreated kind. God and man were obviously differ-

ent species. Their “lives” were on a completely different plane. One was merely human and the Other was divine. One was a lower life form, bound to the earth by a physical body, while the Other is Spirit and fills the universe.

Not only did man’s life not attain to being equal with God’s, he wasn’t even second in line. The scriptures teach us that man was made even lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). These considerations present us with sufficient evidence to realize that marriage between them was not possible.

From this analysis, we are brought to the conclusion that man as he was created was not fit to occupy the position intended for him. Therefore, it is logical to suppose that since our Maker had this glorious plan in mind, He also had some way of fulfilling it. He must have made some provision for man to change.

Somewhere in God’s design, there must have been a way prepared for man to become something other than what he was in order to fulfill these holy intentions. And, of course, there was. God in His infinite wisdom had provided all that was necessary. Not surprisingly, the first suggestion of the existence of such a plan is also manifested in the Garden of Eden.

When we read the Genesis account, among the many features of the garden, two particular trees are mentioned – the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9).

We do not have to read very far to discover that these two are much more than mere trees. The devastating effect which eating of the wrong tree had upon mankind seems to be more than sufficient evidence of this fact. Every other tree of the garden had been offered freely to them as food, but this one tree had been strictly forbidden. Its fruit was so deadly, so devastating, that one taste of it altered forever the course of human history.

Now in view of all this, it seems reasonable to suppose that the other tree, the tree of life, also contained fruit of great consequence. If the “death tree” had such a powerful effect, what would have happened if Adam and Eve had

tasted of the tree of life? Could it be that one taste of this other fruit would have changed these two in another, equally dramatic fashion? I believe that you will see as we proceed that this is the case.

What then is the significance of this life tree? What is it that Adam and Eve missed by disobeying their Maker? Perhaps the best way to discover this is to look into the rest of the scripture and see if we can find any clues there.

As we read Genesis chapter 3, we learn that this tree would have imparted to them a variety of life which they did not yet possess. This truth is shown clearly by the statement God made when they were put out of the Garden. "Lest," He says, they should "take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22).

Here we also realize that Adam and Eve had never yet eaten of this tree. Even though it was available to them, they had never taken the opportunity to taste it. If they had done so, they would have already possessed this new kind of life. In fact, it is possible that if they had first sampled this fruit, they would have had the strength and wisdom to forever avoid the other one.

As we have seen, the tree containing this life was "in the midst of the garden" (Gen 2:9). Notice that this was not the jungle of Eden but a garden, signifying it was designed by Someone. In a jungle, the plants grow randomly but every garden has been designed by someone. In this case, this Designer placed the tree of life in the middle of His garden as the very centerpiece of His design.

Surely this indicates to us that the life represented by this tree and its impartation to man is at the very center of all God's intentions concerning man. It is in fact the very vehicle through which He intends to transform man from what he was when he was created into what God desires him to become.

Since this life is so important both to us and to God, because it enables us to fulfill His original design, it seems crucial that we learn as much as we can about it. Each and every Christian should understand thoroughly both the goal toward which God is working and also the means

which He is using to get there. Let us therefore spend a little time to investigate just exactly what this "life" signifies.

FROM ETERNITY TO ETERNITY

The scripture reads in Psalm 90 verse 2, "From eternity to eternity thou art God" (JDV). If we would take a moment and think back in time as far as our imagination will carry us, back before anything was created – God was there. And again, if we project our thoughts into the future as far as we can imagine, to a time when this world has been dissolved and new things have been created – God will still be there. Our heavenly Father is not confined to what we call "time." Time is merely part of His creation but He Himself exists far beyond and above time.

Therefore, God is ever-existing. He is a being Who never had a beginning and will never end. The kind of life which God possesses is uncreated. It did not begin at some particular point in time. God's life, therefore, is described as being "eternal." It is "AIONION" in the original Greek language, which means "spanning the ages." His life is so full of vitality, so ever-living, that even the passage of time does not diminish it.

His is a life without origin or declension, without time of birth or season of death, unchangeable, incorruptible and immortal. This little meditation brings us then to the true biblical meaning of the word "eternal." It simply means without beginning and without end and describes the very life of God. In the rest of this book we will often use the capital letter "L" in the word Life, to designate this supernatural, uncreated life.

With all this in mind, we can now understand something extremely profound. Our God has decided to offer His own Life, this eternal Life, to men and women.

In the scriptures we read: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal (AIONION) life" (Jn 3:16). Praise the Lord! Those who believe into Jesus receive this supernatural Life. Now those who

have believed into Him are no longer “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18) but have been brought into a relationship – a sonship relationship – with the Father.

This relationship was begun through God’s begetting. We are not merely “adopted” sons of God, but we human beings have actually been born of God’s very own life. We have been “begotten... again unto a living hope” (I Pet 1:3)! We have been “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible” (I Pet 1:23)! (See also: Jn 1:13; 3:3-8, I Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).

What an unspeakable thing He has done for us small, insignificant human beings! As parents, fathers and mothers, we beget sons and daughters by passing along our life to them. When we conceive and bear children we transmit the human life which God has given us to others. In the same way God has chosen in His glorious, immeasurable mercy and goodness to give finite men His own incorruptible, never-beginning, never-ending, eternal life.

This is truly a great love which God has for this world. No gift could be greater. Nothing in the universe is more precious, more worth having, more unimaginably great, than the life of God.

Long ago, God was the only being who could be called “immortal.” I Timothy 6:16 states: “...who alone has immortality.” Of course, this is because only He never began and never will end. But now He is begetting children and these children are also eternal beings by virtue of His life. II Timothy 1:10 explains that He “...brought [eternal] life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

No gift could possibly be greater than this. We have the opportunity to become partakers of all that God is. He has imparted His life to men and is calling them by this life to rise above what they are born to be as human beings and to grow into all that He is. What a glorious calling indeed!

THREE GREEK WORDS

Unfortunately, this great truth that God is now imparting His very own life to men has been somewhat obscured to us by the translation of the original Greek

words into our own language. The Greeks were evidently very expressive concerning the idea of "life" and had several different words for it, while in English we have only one word. This then often confuses the true meaning of the New Testament words.

For our purposes here, we will be focusing on three words in the New Testament which are translated as one English word "life." Even though these three words are rendered as one English word, they have separate and distinct meanings. Unless we clearly distinguish between them we may be ignorant of an indescribably essential revelation.

The first word which is translated "life" in our versions is "BIOS" which refers to our life in this physical world. This is the word from which we get our word "biology" and includes such concepts as our livelihood, the duration of our physical life and our moral conduct.

The second word which is translated "life" in English is "PSUCHÊ." This word has been translated as both "soul" and "life" and perhaps could have been in some places rendered "soul life" to give a more precise meaning. Throughout the New Testament this word represents the psychological make-up or the soul life which man possesses. It is this "life" which comprises our thinking, our feeling, and our decision-making processes. And it is by this life that unregenerated men live in this present world.

AIONIAN ZOË

There is, however, a third Greek word, a most important word, which is translated "life." This word is "ZOË." According to W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, it means "life as God has it." When it comes to "life," God really has it! In the New Testament this very special word "ZOË" is used predominantly to refer to God's very own life.

This special, unique word has been used by the writers of the New Testament as they were inspired by God to refer to His own incorruptible, unoriginated, ageless,

unending life. Therefore, when the Bible speaks about the new life which God gives us through Jesus, it is this word “ZOË” rather than “BIOS” or ‘PSUCHË” which is used.

The phrase “eternal life” then is expressed in the Greek language as “AIONION ZOË” and means “a life which spans the eons.” This AIONION ZOË, the age spanning, never-beginning, never-interrupting, never-ceasing life of God – this is what Jesus came to bring.

Brothers and sisters, we have received an indescribable gift. God has given to us more than we could ask or ever imagine. We frail human beings, existing in a body which is decaying, living in a world which is breaking down and falling apart in many different ways, have come into a most wonderful thing.

The God of the universe has taken us into His heart and decided to impart to us a new life – an incorruptible, immutable life substance which it is impossible to kill: a life which is His very own.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead because it was not possible that the life which He possessed could be held by death (Acts 2:24). So we also, having become children of God through the new birth, have become partakers of a Life over which death has no power. Jesus said that anyone who believes into Him will never perish but has “passed from death unto (ZOË) life” (Jn 5:24).

This is an essential truth. The difficulty which many believers have leading a truly spiritual life can be traced to precisely this point. We all know that Jesus Christ came to bring us life. But what kind?

If the distinction between these three Greek words is not made, it is possible for some to think that “abundant life” (Jn 10:10) means having lots of money, many luxuries, or filling their life with material and physical pleasures (BIOS). Others may imagine that “abundant life” means to be happy or satisfied with our earthly existence (PSUCHË).

Many of those who are misled in this way end up falling into serious error or sin. By misunderstanding the purposes of God and failing to discern the variety of life which Jesus came to give, they have been turned aside to

pursue another “life” – a soulish life or a worldly life – a life which we will soon discover Jesus came to condemn.

EVERLASTING OR ETERNAL?

Another common misconception in the church today is that “eternal” life is simply an extension or prolonging of the life with which we were born. This erroneous understanding has perhaps been fostered in part by the use of the word “everlasting” in the text.

“Everlasting” is a misleading translation of the word “AIONION.” In many English translations, the words “everlasting” and “eternal” are used interchangeably. This has been the cause of great confusion since there is an important difference in their meaning in the English language.

Biblically speaking, the word “eternal” signifies “without beginning” as well as “without end,” while the word “everlasting” only indicates “without end.” Thus, “everlasting” could be applied to a creature which was born at some point in time and then lasted forever and ever. Consequently, it is easy for someone reading about “everlasting” life to suppose that it refers to his own life continuing unendingly.

As we have been seeing, this is definitely not the case. To nullify this mistake, let us simply remember that in the Bible, when we read about “everlasting life” what is really meant is “eternal life,” which is the uncreated life of God.

Everyone who believes into Jesus has received God’s own life. And it is this life which is God’s agency for changing us from what we are into all that He planned for us to be. It is this life which will change our nature to be like His.

Just as in the beginning when our heavenly Father placed before man the source of His own life, so today He has made it available to all through His own Son. The scriptures clearly teach us that “...he who has the Son has (ZOE) life” (I Jn 5:12). Those who are wise will avail themselves of this Life, fill themselves with it and thus obtain all its benefits.

Those who are foolish will neglect it as our forefathers did and eventually suffer the consequences. The life of God which He has given to us is absolutely crucial to our spiritual walk. It is this life which is the source of all that God is doing within us.

I hope that it is perfectly clear here that what Jesus died to make available to us was not a new place to live out the rest of our lives, such as heaven. Neither did He bring us an extension of the life with which we were born. He came to give us a Life which was entirely different from any that we had previously known.

Jesus Christ came to impart to men God's very own eternal, uncreated life. He came with the intention of giving to us the very life, essence, and nature of all that God the Father is. What Jesus Christ has brought to earth for men is the most precious substance! There is nothing else in the universe like it. The Life that He came to give us never began and by definition it can never end. We have become partakers of the life of God. Hallelujah! Now that is really good news.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they were put out of the garden and the way into the Garden of Eden – the avenue to the tree of life – was blocked by a cherubim holding a flaming sword. The original way, the way God first intended man to take, was now impassable. Anyone who sought to enter therein would be slain. God's judgment, symbolized by the Cherubim with the flaming sword, now stood between man and His supernatural life.

What was once freely offered was now carefully guarded and sinful man was thereby forbidden to partake of it. Now man, instead of having God's favor, was under His judgment. The bliss that this first couple once enjoyed and the communion with God which was so familiar to them, suddenly disappeared.

The choices these two had made were not without consequences. Seemingly the devil had won a victory and God's eternal purposes had been thwarted. The man whom the Lord created in His own image and likeness, intending for them to become His holy bride had instead

become polluted by sin and disqualified from partaking of His own life.

But perhaps the devil did not understand the depths of God's love for His bride. Maybe he failed to fathom the lengths to which He would go to achieve His purposes. God's original intention remained unchanged. His heartfelt desire to share His life with human beings continued unabated.

These unique creatures, the only ones in all the universe to bear the image and likeness of the eternal God, had fallen. Still God yearned for them to be brought back into communion with Himself and for them to be again in a position to partake of all that He had planned for them.

His unsearchable love for mankind was undiminished. His initial plan for creating men and offering them His own life still burned within His heart. God, in His infinite wisdom and according to His eternal purpose, had prepared another way, a "new and living way," back to Himself (Heb 10:20).

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

Since the rebellion of man demanded the death penalty and barred the way to His own life, God, in order to fulfill His plan, had to find a substitute. Through His imponderable foreknowledge, He found an innocent Person who was willing to taste death on our behalf – His own son.

In His flesh Jesus Christ made atonement for man's rebellion and sin. In His own self He bore our sins on the cross, taking them out of the way. Jesus has reconciled us to God. Through Christ we have been brought back into a relationship with the Father. By the work of the Son, the shedding of His blood, we now have access to God. Once again, the way to Life Himself has been opened.

What an infinitely precious thing Jesus has done for us undeserving sinners, bringing us back to God and making the way for us to partake of His eternal, uncreated life!

You see, God could not give His life to unrighteous men. He would not put His holy, sinless life into polluted

containers. Sin had hindered God's purposes. It was impossible for Him to allow His life to be mingled with the unrighteousness in man.

So, before the impartation of such a pure substance, the receptacle had to be purified. Christ's blood shed on Calvary has provided just such a cleansing. The innocence and purity of the life which was taken there has, in the sight of God, atoned for our filthiness. There, in a supernatural way which is difficult for us to understand, God passed over our sin and removed the obstacles which stood in the way.

When the time was right God sent His own Son to rescue us. He sacrificed Him, allowing Him to be tortured, ridiculed, and slain. The judgment which was reserved for us fell upon the Lamb. With His death on the cross, the righteous requirement of God was satisfied and the Cherubim of judgment with the flaming sword was taken out of the way. Once again, the way to the tree of Life was opened and the invitation given.

Not only did Jesus make a way to life for us, but He was also the manifestation of this life. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, He came as a vessel containing God's life. We read in the scriptures, "In Him was [ZOË] life; and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). Again we read, "For the [ZOË] life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us" (I Jn 1:2).

Part of Jesus' mission was to make known to mankind all that the Father was offering. He was the full declaration of the thoughts and intentions of God. The life of God which was somewhat obscurely manifested in the garden in the form of a tree, has now been fully exhibited.

Jesus himself proclaimed this. He invited the people to come to Him and eat, to come to Him and drink (Jn 6:54). He explained that He was the "bread of life" (Jn 6:48), and "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).

At one point He even instructed His followers to eat His flesh to obtain this Life, causing many of them to be offended (Jn 6:53). But this should not trouble us. Here He

was simply proclaiming that whatever had been available in the garden in the form of a tree was now being offered through Him.

Through His Son, God was making this offer of Life again. Today, just as in the days of our first ancestors there is a choice for every human being to make. How are we responding to it?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS ESSENTIAL

Once we are born from above this is just the beginning of a Christian life. As wonderful as it is to receive the new life from God, this is only the first step of a life-long process of growing in the Lord. It is only the introduction to “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor 7:1). Not only do we need to receive this new life but we also need this life to grow up in us into full maturity. The Bible teaches that, after being born in a manger, “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature” (Lk 2:52). In the same way, we, too, must grow spiritually until the expression of God through us is complete.

We as Christians must disabuse ourselves of the notion that once we receive Jesus, this is the consummation of spiritual experience. Receiving God’s life through the Spirit is just the beginning. Just as the birth of a baby is only the first event of its whole lifetime, so also when we are born of the Spirit, this is just the initial step of a life full of growing in the knowledge of God.

The Father’s intention is that we would be daily eating, drinking and thereby growing into all that Christ came to bring – all of which is freely poured out to us in the Holy Spirit. The life of God, the most precious, valuable element in the whole universe, is abundantly available to every believer right now today. Through His Spirit, we can continually partake of AIONIAN ZOË.

Everywhere the scriptures speak of such growth. Ephesians 4:14,15 urges us to “...grow up into Him in all things,” recommending that we be no longer babies who are easily misled. I John chapter two speaks of different

stages of spiritual growth, i.e. children, young men and fathers. Surely it is easy to see then that maturity is not instantaneous but takes time and attention.

This too is an essential part of our Christian experience. Remaining a baby is not good enough. Spiritual growth is optional only for those who are foolish. We must continually seek the Lord and nurture this life which has been given to us so that it can grow to maturity.

Everywhere in nature we notice that all kinds of life must grow. Even though, for example, an entire oak tree is contained within an acorn, it takes time and nurturing for that tree to attain its full stature. In the same way, even though the life which we receive from God is complete, it takes time and attention for it to arrive at full maturity.

If we are to be useable sons of God, manifesting His life and nature to the world in a powerful way, we too must grow into His fullness (Eph 4:15). Babies are wonderful, but they are not very useful. Instead of being able to help out and contribute to the well-being of the household, they require our time and attention. I am confident that God greatly loves all His babies, but I am also firmly convinced that He is seeking sons who have grown into maturity to fulfill His purposes on the earth.

Too many Christians suppose that being born again is the end, the ultimate. They imagine that after regeneration the only thing left is to accumulate "rewards" in heaven. How far from the truth this is! Growing into a full spiritual maturity is the only way in which we can be really useful in God's kingdom.

It is important to note that this growth does not happen automatically. God is not forcing His way upon us. He graciously allows us all to choose. Just as we had to make a choice to receive His life to be born again, so we must make a daily choice to be filled with His life. No one else can make us grow.

Unless we set our hearts to seek the presence of the Lord every day and spend time in intimate communion with Him, we will grow very little. If our choice is to spend our time pursuing our own interests, spiritual dormancy is

a certainty. Growth in God's life is available to all, but is realized only by those who make a conscious choice to pursue it. Those who make this choice will benefit greatly not only in this world but also in that which is to come.

Once again, as it was with our forefather Adam, the choice is up to us. It is ours to make every day. Will we choose according to God's desire and partake of that which He is freely offering? Or will we, as the first men, pay little attention to what has been so generously provided and go our own way?

This is not a small or insignificant consideration. It is all too easy to become preoccupied with the things which surround us and the outward blessings which God has given and so neglect the most important thing of all. These daily choices have eternal consequences. God's unmerited favor and mercy should not be lightly disregarded. May God grant us mercy that we would partake of His life continually.

In the coming chapters of this writing we are going to be looking at many different aspects of what God is doing in and through His people. However, in order to do so properly, we must first be firmly rooted in this most basic understanding: Eternal life is not our own life lasting forever nor is it simply a kind of fire insurance that guarantees we will not spend eternity in the lake of fire. Receiving eternal life is nothing less than receiving God's very own life – the uncreated life of God!

It is through this life that God is bringing many sons into glory. Without a doubt, God has very serious intentions concerning the impartation of His life. He has not done His work indiscriminately. So if we are to fulfill His requirements, we must carefully guard the "...good deposit that was entrusted" to us (I Tim 1:14).

3.

THE TWO TREES

*F*or reasons which we have been discussing in the previous chapters of this book, God desired to share His own life with man from the very beginning. This is evidenced by the tree of life planted in the center of the Garden of Eden. But there was also another tree growing there, a very sinister tree – the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9).

We have surmised that the first tree was symbolic of God’s life but what about this other one? What does it represent? Why did God allow a tree with such devastating capabilities to grow there, freely available to His new race?

Of course, He did give them warning concerning it. His solemn word was spoken clearly so that there could be no chance of a mistake. However, it is equally plain that God was allowing them to make their own decisions concerning their ultimate destiny. In His infinite wisdom He allowed them to have free will. If they were ever going to enter into the marvelous plan for which He had made them, it would be because they willingly chose to do so, not because they were forced into it.

So from the beginning Adam and Eve were presented with a choice. They found themselves between two opposing possibilities. On one hand was the tree of which they could freely eat and on the other the one of which they were commanded not to partake. While it certainly must have been permissible for them not to choose either, these

two trees with all that they represented were always there in front of them.

Their location “in the midst of the garden” must have made them the focal point of attention. Consequently, the decision to eat or to refrain from eating was probably never very far from their thoughts.

Interestingly enough, these same two alternatives are available to men today. Christians and non-Christians alike are daily exposed to these two options and all that they entail. Even though two physical trees are not in front of us, what they represent is abundantly available. Therefore, it seems important for us to take some time here and discuss together exactly what these two trees signify.

Since we, just as this first couple, are actually confronted daily with this choice, it is essential that we understand what it is. Although Adam and Eve may have been innocent and not fully aware of all that their decision involved, we cannot claim the same excuse. Their own example, combined with all God’s revelation since that time, provides us with ample evidence of what God’s way is and also of what these trees produce.

Unfortunately, many of God’s children are ignorant of these things. Far too many believers are completely unaware of the significance of these spiritual realities.

Thus, they easily fall prey to the wiles of the enemy in the same way that Eve was seduced (II Cor 11:3). Truly the scripture says: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Pr 29:18). I am afraid that the way into all that God has for us is strewn with the hurt, wounded, and “slain” believers who have stumbled into the ditch in the darkness. Somehow they failed to see in the light of God how to stay on His narrow way and were taken captive by the foe.

We already have discussed what was represented by the tree of life but for many readers some of its consequences may not be immediately clear. As we have been seeing, it is possible to receive into our being the life of Another. Since this Other is supremely superior to ourselves in every way, what does this imply? How will such

a thing affect us? To start with it seems logical to suppose that this other Life, being so much superior to our own, will tend to predominate. In fact, it will want to take over.

This of course is exactly what God wishes to do. Once His life is within us, He intends to become the boss ("Lord" is the scriptural term). His will is that we increasingly submit every aspect of our living to His authority.

We read in the scriptures that in everything He is to have the preeminence (Col 1:18). All of a sudden we find that independence and "doing our own thing" are no longer acceptable. By opening our heart to Him, we have also gotten ourselves into a situation where we are no longer our own.

Unfortunately many people are "brought to Christ" without this most basic understanding. They are told about a Savior but not about a Lord who is to have dominion over them. They are encouraged to accept the benefits which God gives without any warnings about the commitment it involves. Far too many men and women are urged to "come to Jesus" without even a hint that it means such a radical change in the rulership of their lives.

However, as we shall be seeing in the remainder of this book, this change is not only available but essential. This Life into which we have been called is not just a Sunday School story. We have become involved with the God of the Universe and the implications of this fact are truly great.

THE SIN OF LUCIFER

If, then, full submission to this new Life is the central premise of God's tree, what are the consequences of the other? In order to properly understand the answer to this, we first must look at another being who was created before the fall of man. Lucifer, once perhaps the highest, holiest angel, is the one of whom we must speak. All that is symbolized in the tree that brings death can be traced to this one being. Consequently, to fully comprehend this tree and its disastrous effects, we must also have a good grasp on who the devil is and how he got to be where he is today.

In the book of Isaiah we discover that this now-fallen angel is referred to as the “son of the morning” (Is 14:12). Such a title probably indicates that he was formed during the earliest stages of God’s creative work. Quite possibly, he was the first being ever created.

Still another passage teaches that he was “perfect” and beautiful when he was made (Ezek 28:12). It is probable that this angel was the most powerful, supremely attractive creature fashioned by God and that, as such, he was also second only to God in the chain of command of the universe.

Now most of us would probably think that this would be a pretty good position to hold but for him there was one slight irritation. This lofty place, in the very presence of the Almighty, brought with it one requirement. He had to be in every detail completely submitted to God.

One day Lucifer began to notice his own beauty. No doubt the other angels really admired him too. He fully realized that his power and intelligence were unparalleled among them. Concerning his many abilities he knew of no one greater, outside of God Himself. His desire to really magnify himself and fully exhibit his grandeur slowly began to grow.

As time went by, the constraint of being completely obedient to the Father and using his energy to serve only Him began to wear on his nerves. Here there was just no room for self-expression. All his many talents and tremendous creativity were being wasted by just being a servant. How could he really gain the full appreciation of the others, which he so rightly deserved, under such terrible bondage? Just who did God think He was anyway?

So as we all know, with some such thoughts flowing through his mind, the creature we today refer to as Satan fell into sin. I believe that it should be quite enlightening for us to understand how this happened.

Lucifer did not begin by committing adultery with his secretary. He did not initially kill someone or rob an old lady down the street. No, none of these things which seem “so bad” to us initiated his demise.

Instead, his first sinful act was something which to many people seems quite natural. He made a decision – a decision to become independent. He said: “I will ascend”... “I will exalt my throne”... “I will be like the Most High” (Is 14: 13,14). Here, he cast off all restraint and began to assert his own will, rebelling against God Almighty.

This was his premier sin. He left his position of total dependence upon and submission to God and began to exercise his own will in pursuit of his own desires. Of course, pride was very much a part of this. Lying, spiritual adultery, theft, and murder all followed close behind. In fact, all that is contrary to the righteousness of God became his in this single act – rebellion against the one true authority.

With all this in mind, we can now begin to examine the second tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Evidently when Adam and Eve were created, they were lacking something. They did not possess the ability to discern between good and evil. This then placed them in a position where they had to depend upon God.

As we have previously discussed, in many respects they were made like their Creator, but in this one area of making moral decisions they were forced to rely upon His guidance and direction.

However, there was a knowledge-imparting tree not too far away. There was another “source,” another “way,” operating in the universe and it was available to them. Although it had been forbidden, it had its representation in the Garden of Eden. By tasting of this tree, the first men could gain something which they did not have – independence. One bite of this fruit and they no longer needed to be in a subservient, dependent position. They could be as God.

THREE SIMPLE LURES

This, then, is exactly the temptation which deceived Eve and then corrupted Adam. When the serpent came to lure them into his web, he did so with great subtlety. There can be no question that he fully understood the conse-

quences of eating the wrong tree. Evidently he had already been in the business of inducing other beings to follow him in his rebellion and so had plenty of experience.

As he spoke to Eve, he appealed to three elements of weakness which are still prevalent in the human race today. Somehow, he revealed to her three things: number one, this tree is delicious (the lust of the flesh); number two, it is extremely attractive to look at (the lust of the eyes); and the clincher – number three, just one taste of it will make you wise enough so that you can be independent from God (the pride of life) (I Jn 2:16). Just one little bite would end all this uncomfortable submission to Another and provide her with what she needed to run her own life.

Interestingly, it is these same three attractions that he used to tempt our Lord in the wilderness. No new tactics were used here. First, since Jesus was hungry, the devil tried to get Him to satisfy His own needs by turning stones into bread. (Please remember that it was the Holy Spirit who had driven Him here and therefore it was the Father who was responsible for His welfare.)

Next, he works on His eyes by showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory in a moment of time. Riches, honor, and earthly power are freely available to anyone who will really assert themselves and go after it. Many people in the world today and even in the Church are discovering the power of self-assertion. Of course, if this is your inclination, falling down to worship God's enemy is also helpful.

However, I'm confident that he will allow any interested Christian to skip this formality (at least outwardly). If they will only use their energies to promote themselves and thereby build up the devil's dark, self-centered kingdom, that will certainly suffice.

Lastly, Satan appealed to ego. He said something like: "If you are really someone great as you claim to be, prove it by making a big scene requiring angelic intervention. Show everyone who you really are. Display yourself fully so that we can all admire you. Never mind this dependence on God business; if you are really the Son of God (a

King's kid?) you must have some of your own authority. Do something really extraordinary to assert your independence and establish your own personhood" (Lk 4:9-12).

How thankful we should be that Jesus had the strength to withstand this temptation. He was one who was truly submitted to the Father. Every aspect of His life was lived in subjection to the Father's will.

The life that He lived, the works which He accomplished, and even the words which He spoke were all in perfect harmony with the directions from Above (Jn 14:10). He came to this earth not to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him (Jn 6:38).

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did not possess the same strength of character. Their innocence was not equal to Christ's holiness and so proved to be no match for the enemy. When confronted with the prospect of becoming their own masters, they jumped at the opportunity.

Apparently it did not take long years of wooing by the serpent to convince Eve. One short session on self-expression was all that was necessary to persuade her to violate God's clear commandment and turn her back on Him. She saw before her, easily within her grasp, the possibility of becoming "complete," independent, and self-reliant. Little did she realize what other "benefits" also came in the same package. God, with good reason, had warned them not to partake.

At the moment in which Lucifer decided to assert himself, darkness plunged in upon him. By setting himself in opposition to God, his nature was changed to be everything the Almighty was not. God's gracious character, His truth, justice, mercy, righteousness, love, beauty, majesty, etc. had to be withstood in a being who was in rebellion against Him.

So Satan's character became the antithesis of all these things. Cruelty, hatred, violence, lying, deception, vanity, and far more became the hallmarks of his kingdom. This one decision to disobey changed his nature forever from the glory and beauty with which he was created to one full of darkness and sin.

Sadly, our first forefathers entered into a similar experience. Their one decision to rebel also cost them dearly. Many people do not realize the extent to which these first two fell. Some, while admitting that people today do sin once in a while, feel that there is still some “good” in man. Actually the problem is far deeper than that. At the bottom of it lies not what we do but what we are.

When Adam and Eve partook of this fruit their very natures were changed. They were no longer innocent. The devil’s prediction had come true. They no longer needed to depend upon God for instruction concerning moral issues. They had become independent – their own masters. Consequently, they, too, plunged into darkness and corruption.

THE KNOWLEDGE TREE

I believe it is important for us here to take some time and analyze the tree from which this tremendous deception came. First, we might notice that it is a tree of *both* good and evil. Most people probably imagine that it is a tree of evil only and the other tree, the tree of life, must be the tree of good. However, such is not the case. Here, we see that the knowledge of good is also on the tree of which God commanded the first men not to eat. To partake of it is sin. How can we understand such a thing?

To begin we must understand that the tree which causes death is principally a tree of knowledge. This is not simply a tree of “good and evil” but also a tree which imparts knowledge to those who taste it. Its fruit has the effect of conferring the ability to distinguish between what was right and what was wrong.

Those who partake of it can know for themselves the difference between good and evil. This “knowledge” enables the possessors thereof to be their own masters. They can then determine their own course in life.

It is precisely here that Adam and Eve gained their independence. With this wisdom and discernment, they could analyze their situations and predicaments, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the available options,

and make a decision. Well, you might ask, what is wrong with that?

The problem is just what we saw in the beginning of this chapter. All this can be accomplished in complete independence from God. Such decisions can be taken without submission to and reliance upon the Most High.

When we act in this way, we are being our own gods. We are taking the course of our lives in our own hands. We are acting according to our own wisdom and understanding. This, of course, is only natural. Everyone does it. In fact, since the fall of Adam and Eve, this is way in which all mere worldlings conduct their lives.

But God is looking for those who will return to His original intention. He is searching for those who will not "lean on their own understanding" (Pr 3:5). His desire is for those who will be guided, not through their own intelligence and wisdom, not through their own ability to decide for themselves, but through their communion with Himself.

Adam and Eve were intended to become, as Jesus was, a living expression of the Father. This goal was to be accomplished through communion with and submission to the Father. Eating of the tree of life would have brought His life right inside of them. Thusly, the manifestation of God in their lives would be the result of their intimate relationship with Him.

By living in fellowship with the Father, all His thoughts, attitudes and character could be infused into them. This relationship of dependence would cause them to then express His holy nature to the universe. It would be a kind of "imputed" righteousness which was exhibited through them but did not initiate inside of them.

Instead of this glorious possibility, however, they acquired a kind of knowledge which enabled them to exist without God, simultaneously receiving all that this entailed.

Although the independent way is open still to any who choose it, believers in Jesus are called to partake of another tree. They are called to enter into a relationship with their king who will guide them.

In fact, He will enter into them and lead them from the inside. He will provide them with a wisdom which does not originate on this earth. He may lead them to do things which from a human point of view are foolish. He will cause them to live in a way which makes tremendous sense from an eternal point of view but may seem ridiculous to those who guide their own paths according to this world's views.

You see, the wisdom of this world, provided by the death tree, is foolishness to God (I Cor 3:19). It may seem perfectly logical, but it does not take into account the Divine point of view.

Peter, using his own intellect and wisdom, urged Jesus not to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross (Mt 16:21-23). How natural and right this seems from a human perspective! Yet, from an heavenly view, it was the work and wisdom of Satan.

Can you see how dangerous human wisdom is? Can you grasp how rebellious our own use of the knowledge which we gain can be? Eve and Adam did not. To them, it seemed good and desirable. It appeared liberating. It provided them with a means to be independent and self-sufficient. How does it appear to you today? Are you drawn by the thought of being something and somebody? Or are you attracted to the thought of complete dependence upon Another?

HOW WE USE GOD'S WORD

While we are discussing the knowledge of good and evil, which is the ability to know right and wrong, we must also touch upon the use of the scriptures. The Bible was given to us by God. Every word was breathed from His mouth (II Tim 3:16). It is profitable for correction, reproof, and training in righteousness. We cannot, and we would never wish to, dispute this fact. However, it is also true that the scriptures can be used wrongly.

For example, Satan in his temptation of Jesus quoted the Scriptures. Many, many people down through the cen-

turies, including some people of God, have used and twisted the scriptures to their own destruction (II Pet 3:16).

The Pharisees are a good example of this error. They knew from God's text exactly where the Messiah was to be born, yet they did not go to worship Him. They understood that the price of blood could not be accepted for an offering when Judas returned his money (Mt 27:6). Yet they were the ones who paid it! They daily searched the scriptures (Jn 5:39) to know what was right and what was wrong, yet they would not come and submit themselves to Jesus.

How easy it is to eat of the wrong tree. It is all too possible to even use the Bible to discover what is right and what is wrong – what is good and what is evil – and then use this knowledge to run our own lives. The hypocrites of Jesus' day are not unique. Today, also, we encounter many who use the Scriptures frequently, yet they are not really submitted to God.

Once we discover for ourselves the correct and the incorrect way to act or think, we are then empowered by this knowledge to live in an independent manner. We can run our own life according to "scriptural" principles. We can know good and evil for ourselves and make our own decisions accordingly. This kind of activity is not only possible, it is common.

Many Christians imagine that they can pattern their life according to biblical laws or New Testament principles and thus be pleasing to God. They dutifully study the scriptures, discover what is right and wrong, good and evil, and try to live by this knowledge. In this way we fulfill the scripture by "...going about to establish their [our] own righteousness, they [we] did not submit to the righteousness of God" (Rm 10:3).

Hopefully, from the foregoing discussion, you can begin to see the error of this strategy. The question here is not "right and wrong." They are both on the same tree – the one that causes death.

Instead, our quest should be to learn to live in communion with and dependence upon God. He is the One

who is to lead us. He is the One to solve our moral dilemmas. He is the One who will give us understanding of how and what we should do.

A true, intimate walk with God entails a great degree of childlike innocence, not knowing so much how to deal with life and all its problems but trusting moment by moment in the Father. Certainly, the Bible is one of the chief vehicles through which God will communicate His will to us. Our concern is that we should be daily becoming more dependent upon Him and less self-sufficient.

Did you know that the Bible can cause spiritual death? In its pages it says exactly that! Paul teaches us that the “letter” of the Bible kills (II Cor 3:6). This means that it is possible to use the scriptures in a wrong way which ministers spiritual death. If we take Bible knowledge into our own hands and act with it independently from God, we become ministers of death and bondage.

Just like Eve we can eat from the death tree and share its fruit with others. We can become people full of knowledge – knowledge of what is right and what is wrong, knowledge of what we should and shouldn’t do, knowledge of what is “scriptural” and what is in error. Then armed with this knowledge we can go about sharing this information with others, expecting them to begin to act as we do. This is the ministry of death.

THE MINISTRY OF DEATH

I believe that you can confirm this from your own experience. Have you ever met Christians who thought they knew it all? They were more right than anyone else about almost everything. From the pages of God’s book they had synthesized a whole scheme of doctrine to govern their (and others’) behavior.

While there may be little of their teaching which seems in error, there is a “flavor” about the whole experience which does not seem right. The sweetness of Christ is missing. The attitudes and character of Jesus are not dominating.

Instead what is conveyed is a sense of demand, conformity, and self-effort to try to reach some standard. This is the ministry of death. It is eating from the tree of right and wrong, good and evil. It is using the word of God without being truly submitted to Him. Obedience to the demands of the law is not the same thing as intimate communion with our Lord. Under the New Covenant, lack of intimacy with God is really rebellion against Him.

Paul, the apostle, explains that it is the Spirit that gives Life. The same biblical words which cause death when ministered by the natural man, transmit Life when used while operating under the authority and control of the Holy Spirit. Paul said he was a minister of Life (II Cor 3:6). His use of the Holy Scriptures was not something derived from his own intelligence. It did not come from study and memorization.

Although I am confident that he meditated daily in the scripture, he knew how to submit himself to God. He understood that he was not qualified to act independently, interpreting and expounding the things of Christ by himself. He knew how to be a vessel under the control of Jesus. He knew how to eat of the tree of life.

Those who understand this secret convey a different impression. This fruit also has a distinctive flavor. Underlying the personality of those walking in Life is the unmistakable sense of the divine. There is something about them which conveys the sweetness of the One whom they (and we) love.

THE LAST MINUTE

Perhaps the foregoing understanding can help us understand why so many times we must wait until the last minute for Supernatural deliverance. How many times have we cried out to God, waited and waited, and then taken matters into our own hands just like King Saul in the Old Testament?

We must learn to be dependent completely upon God. Time and again He will test us to help us see how we still rely upon our own strength.

As we have seen, this subject is very close to His heart. It is at the center of His will concerning man. True Christianity is a life lived in complete dependence upon the Father. This requires a daily, close relationship with Him. Without this, the only choice is to eat of the forbidden tree of knowledge and with the help of its fruit steer our own course.

How we need to cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus. Only in this way will we be partaking daily of His life. It is this Life which will fill us and guide us throughout the day. And it is this Life which will pour out of us to others in a truly spiritual ministry.

Jesus is the fountain of Life. He explains that if we come to Him, He will be in us a fountain of Life (Jn 7:38, 39), bubbling up, spilling over and transmitting this Life to others all around.

In relationship to spiritual things there are two kinds of "knowledge." One could be called a knowledge *about* God. The other is the knowledge *of* God. The first comes from mental study of available information, the second from intimacy with Him. These, dear friends, are the two trees. They are both available today. Which of them are you choosing?

4.

THE TWO NATURES

*W*hat we have been seeing in the previous chapters of this book is that from the beginning, God had a marvelous plan for man. His deepest desire was to create a being similar to Himself who could become His bride. Our God was not content to be alone forever but fashioned mankind with the capacity to receive His own eternal life. Being full of His life, men could then become qualified to enter into this unspeakably holy union with Himself.

This then is the central issue in the universe today. The impartation of Divine life and the changing of mankind into what he needs to be in order to fulfill the Supernatural design is at the heart of all that is taking place in the spiritual and physical worlds. Failure to comprehend this most basic revelation will severely hinder us in our walk with Jesus and our working together with Him to accomplish His will on the earth.

Many people suppose that when God's work in us is finished, we will have "returned to Eden." In other words, they believe that God is trying to get us back to the original state in which Adam and Eve were found in the garden. This, they presume, would be the ultimate in sanctity.

However, this is not the truth. As we examine these original creatures which God made, we discover some serious deficiencies. In their original state, they could never fulfill God's design. In the first place, as we have seen in the previous chapters, they did not contain God's life. This

then disqualified them from entering into a marriage union with Him. Secondly, we see that they did not have a holy nature like His.

Yes, Adam and Eve were sinless. Many Bible scholars describe their first state as "innocent." But as we see, innocence and sinlessness are not the same as holiness. God is supremely holy. This is the essence of His nature. And because He is holy, we read that He "cannot be tempted with evil" (Jas 1:13). Sin does not interest Him. There is nothing, I repeat, nothing in His holy being which is the least bit interested in sin. In fact, He hates it!

On the other hand, when Adam and Eve were tempted, what happened? They fell, and they fell quickly. You see, their sinless, innocent state was no match for the devil. It was not the same thing as God's holiness.

So then if man is to enter into a marriage union with the Most High, some changes need to be effected in his being. First he must receive the Divine life, and secondly he must have a holy nature. Our God says: "Be holy; for I am holy" (I Pet 1:16). Further we read about "...holiness, without which *no one will see the Lord*" (Heb 12:14).

Some in Christian circles today would like to skip over the matter of holiness altogether. They would assert that being born again is enough and that true righteousness is something which we will only get later on, after we die. A little improvement is O.K. with them but serious deliverance from all sin is a little too hard and impractical. "After all," they say, "who do you know who is really holy?"

Others would like to relegate holiness to something which only exists in the mind of God. They would assume that we are already holy because God looks upon us as being holy. We don't actually need to be righteous because God's requirements are already satisfied by Jesus and therefore holiness is not really a requirement. These ideas raise many issues which I do not have space to deal with here but will treat in a subsequent chapter entitled "The Blood of the Covenant."

Suffice it to say here that as we honestly read the New Testament, we encounter real holiness. The apostles were

holy people. The New Testament believers were constantly urged to purify themselves, to abstain from sin and to avoid temptation and sensual pleasures. Here in the Bible, we read about a righteousness which was “down to earth.” It was visible. People could see it exhibited in the disciples! It was not some airy fairy, “pie-in-the-sky-some day-when you-die” kind of holiness but was something which emanated from the lives of the followers of Jesus.

I am not saying that they were all perfect, but most of them certainly were not filling their lives with fleshly indulgences and sin and excusing themselves by saying that God considered them righteous. These disciples were loving, longsuffering, giving, forgiving, sin-hating people. They did not habitually practice sin. And their example is for us. The way they lived is the same way we should live in this present evil world.

This then brings us to the crux of the matter. How is this possible? How can we sinful human beings ever be holy? How can we possibly approach the standard of being as holy as God?

To begin, we must understand a very important principle. Every life has its own nature. For example, a dog barks because it has the dog’s life within it. It is the nature of the dog’s life to bark. An apple tree produces apples because it is the nature of the apple tree life to produce this kind of fruit. This is an inalterable principle in the universe which God has made. You will never see dogs singing like birds or apple trees bearing bananas because it is not the nature of their lives to do such things.

In the same way, human beings sin. It is the nature of the fallen life which we inherited from Adam to sin. You never have to teach children to sin. It comes very naturally. It is a spontaneous product of the life which is in them.

I know a woman whose mother believed otherwise. She thought that sin was something which was learned from others. So, when her daughter was young, she sheltered her from all outside, evil influences. She protected this child and nurtured her like a tender plant, free from all stimuli which might corrupt her.

Then finally the day arrived for this “perfect” child to be introduced to the world. The mother took her precious daughter to visit another young girl in the neighborhood. Well, it wasn’t too long before an argument arose between these two children and behold, the “perfect” child was seen beating the other girl over the head with a doll!

Sin is a product of the fallen life which we inherited from our father, Adam. Now, let me be very clear about this: People do not always sin every minute of every day. Apple trees do not always bear apples. Dogs do not always bark. But they will eventually. It is inevitable. Given time, the sinful life within the human race will always produce fruit. It is impossible that it could not fulfill its nature and do so.

In exactly the same way, holiness is a spontaneous product of God’s life. God exhibits righteousness because the Life within Him is completely righteous. He is perfectly and purely holy. There is no sin lurking deep within His being. He has no darkness within Him. God is not trying to be holy. He just IS. Furthermore, our God is the only being in the universe who is like this.

Therefore, there is only one way to exhibit this same holiness. We must be filled with His holy, sinless life. That’s right. The only way to be truly righteous is to have the Righteous Life inside of you. As you live by this Life, you express its nature. As this perfect Life manifests itself through your being, you will exhibit a wonderful holiness.

This righteousness is “not your own” (Philip 3:9). Although it is being seen in you, it is really the righteousness of Another. I believe that this important fact bears repeating: The only way to be holy is to live by God’s life. When we receive Jesus, we receive an uncreated, holy Life. And when we live by this other Life which we have received, we manifest the nature of that new Life.

LIVING BY THE FATHER

Jesus is an example of this. He no doubt received a human life from His mother, Mary. But He also received

the Divine life from God. Our wonderful Savior consistently chose to live His life by the higher source. He said, "as the living Father has sent Me *and I live by the Father...*" (Jn 6:57). Jesus had the living Father within Him. Furthermore, He "lived by the Father."

This means that every aspect of His living was dominated by the Father's life. His thoughts, His feelings, His actions, His reactions, even the expressions on His face were the product of the Supernatural life by which He was living. Therefore, He was a complete expression of the Father. In all that He said and did, the Father was manifested.

In another place Jesus asserted, "The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on my own *authority*, but the Father who lives in Me, He does the works" (Jn 14:10). You see, Jesus was not "expressing Himself." He was not speaking His own words or even doing His own works. He was in every detail of His being subjected to His Father. The life of the Father was flowing through Him and the nature of the Father was pouring out of Him. Jesus was a perfect, complete manifestation of God Almighty.

In the very same way, we can live by Jesus! (Please don't miss this. This must be one of the most important revelations of the Bible.) We can be motivated in every aspect of our being by a supernatural Life. Jesus explains: "As the living Father has sent Me and I live by the Father, even so *he who eats Me, even he shall live by Me*" (Jn 6:57).

This is really exciting! We can live by another Life. We can actually have a substitute Life animating every aspect of our being. And this life is holy. This life is pure. This life cannot be tempted by sin. It is righteous in every way. Hallelujah!

This is a great and wonderful truth. We mere human beings, born into a sinful race, can be reborn into another. We can become one of the sons of God. We can receive the very life of God and then, living by that Life, express His holy nature to the world. This is true holiness.

This is not something which exists only in the mind of God. It is not a righteousness which is invisible. This kind

of righteousness is real, practical and down-to-earth. It is something which the church of our day desperately needs.

This is a wonderful idea, you might say, but how is it possible? There are several aspects to this question which we will be exploring in the remaining chapters of this book, but the most important one is revealed right here in the above verse. Jesus instructs us to eat Him. He asserts that if we eat Him, we will be able to live by Him. In another place He states that, "unless we eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood," we will have no Life in ourselves (Jn 6:53).

This word "life" here in the Greek is ΖΟË, referring to the life of God, which we have discussed in previous chapters. So we see that eating and drinking Jesus is the key to living by His life. When we fill ourselves with Him, He is manifested through us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNION

This then brings us to the question of communion. To have "communion" with someone means to have intimate fellowship with them. When we commune with another, we get together, open up our hearts, and have an intimate exchange of ideas, words, and feelings. This meaning of the word "communion" is very biblical.

Also, in the church today we "take" or have communion. This refers to our "reenactment" of the Lord's supper where we participate together in eating bread and drinking wine.

What we can understand from this is that having intimate fellowship with Jesus *is* the act of eating and drinking of Him. When we come into His presence, open up our heart to Him, and have an intimate exchange, we are partaking of the body and blood of Jesus. It is having genuine communion.

Such intimate communion in the spirit is an essential part of the Christian life. Without it we will "have no life" in ourselves (Jn 6:53). (If you consider yourself to be a Christian and have no idea of what communion with God

means, please, seek out someone who walks in intimacy with God to help you. Don't go another day without intimacy with God!) Fellowship with God is at the heart of a genuine Christian experience. It is the root of all of our spiritual walk. Without becoming legalistic, I must insist that this be our daily experience.

How can we enter into such communion with God? To begin, we must experience a deep and thorough repentance. We must put out of our lives everything which we know is displeasing to God. It is impossible to enjoy intimate fellowship with God while being involved in something which we know He doesn't like.

Think about it. If you are wanting to have a good time visiting with a friend or relative but you are doing something which offends them, doesn't this affect your time together? Certainly it does. In the same way, when we are involved in activities or attitudes which grieve the Lord's heart, this will limit our intimacy with Him.

You cannot have sweet communion with Jesus and have known sin in your life. And without this communion, you will never be full of His life and express His nature. The only alternative then is to hope that He thinks that you are righteous when you know that you are not. Personally, I believe that we should adjust our lives to conform to the scriptures rather than seeking out a doctrine which will excuse us for remaining the way we are.

Next, all of us need a thorough and complete consecration. We must offer our beings as a living sacrifice to God (Rm 12:1). Our body, our soul, and our spirit must be God's. Our mind, our emotions and our will must be yielded to His control. Our possessions, our hopes for the future, our plans, our families, our finances: all these things must be completely and without reserve offered upon His altar. Unless we are completely willing to obey Jesus in every aspect of our lives, this will hinder our communion with Him.

Believing on Jesus is one thing; following Him wherever He is going is another. To have sweet fellowship with God, we must be obedient to His voice. We must be will-

ing to go with Him where He is going. Truly Jesus has said: "...where I am, there My servant will be also" (Jn 12:26).

All Christians need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This too must be our experience, not just a doctrine. I have no interest in debating when or how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. I only know that it is essential and biblical. Furthermore, I do not see how it is possible to be filled with the Spirit of God of the universe and not know it.

To be filled with God's Spirit, we need to open up our lives completely to Him. Our hearts must be ready and willing to receive what He wants to give. After our repentance and consecration, we are then in a position to yield our hearts and open ourselves completely. He will fill us with Himself.

The giving of the Holy Spirit is a promise from God. Seek Him and you will find Him. If there is any hindrance, He will reveal it to you if your heart is sincere. Remember, God will never force Himself on anyone. You must be completely ready and willing if you are to receive all that He has to give.

EATING GOD'S WORD

God is revealed in the scriptures. This, then, is where we can go to experience "eating" of Him. We can feed upon Him in His word. The prophet says: "Your words were found and I ate them, and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer 15:16). When we open our Bibles, we must at the same time open our hearts to Him. We must seek Him in His word.

When you read the Bible, don't concern yourself so much with trying to understand everything. Instead, I would like to recommend that you seek to have fellowship with God in its pages. Allow Him to speak to you. Pray about what He is revealing. Reread the verses or passages which He illuminates. Meditate upon what God is revealing to you about Himself. Commune with Him. In this way you will be eating spiritually. This will cause you to grow

and to be full of Divine Life. When such spiritual eating is your daily habit, you will begin to actually “live by Him” (Jn 6:57). Then you will spontaneously begin to express God’s nature to the world.

As a new Christian, I read the Bible quite a bit. It was a new and living book to me. But as time went on I wanted to understand everything, especially about prophecy and the book of Revelation. Soon, I was reading the Bible with the thought of trying to figure things out. I wanted to understand the beasts, the horns, the three frogs, and all the rest of this fascinating revelation.

Continuing on in this way for some time, I began to notice a problem. This holy book which had previously been so living and refreshing became kind of dry, and my enthusiasm for reading waned. This caused me to cry out to God. What was the problem? Why was my time in His word so unsatisfying?

In answer to my prayer, God led me to a verse. It read: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4). From this I realized that it is the Divine life which produces illumination. Trying to understand the Bible did not produce life. But filling myself with God through communion with Him was not only satisfying but, through it, He was revealing things from His book to me.

DRINKING GOD’S SPIRIT

God is also poured out to us through His Spirit. Not only can we eat of His word, but we can also drink deeply of His Spirit. All we have to do is open our heart and let Him pour Himself into us. All that He is, is abundantly available to us through the Spirit.

I love the fact that God has *poured* out His Spirit. He didn’t dribble it out. It isn’t given sparingly. “Pouring” implies the emptying out of everything. He is not giving it out grudgingly a little at a time. This means that we can have all we want. If there is a lack in our drinking, it is not on God’s side. His will is for us to partake as much and as often as we wish.

We can drink of God's Spirit in prayer. When we come into His presence as we fellowship with Him, we can drink of all that He is. Praying in the Holy Spirit is a wonderful opportunity to partake of communion with God. At these times, try allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your prayers. Don't just pray about your troubles.

How would you like to have a friend who only spoke about his or her problems all the time? Allow the Spirit of God to fill you and lead you in these times of intercession and fellowship. When you are in God's presence, don't do all the talking (Ecc 5:1). In fact, it is better to do more listening. Your loving Father has much to reveal to those who have a willing and receptive heart.

Also, our times of worship are an opportunity to open wide and drink. Not only publicly but in our private times with Jesus, we can drink of His Spirit through our worship. When we worship, it is important that we humble ourselves before God. "Worship" and "pride" are opposites. In our present world, we find very little of the attitude of prostrating ourselves before another and worshipping them.

Yet God is worthy of such praise. When we come before Him with an open and humble heart, spiritual worship becomes a tremendous enjoyment. In fact, I know of no greater pleasure on earth than to enter deeply into a worship experience before the throne of God. This too is drinking of the Spirit of the Lord.

Eating and drinking of Jesus in the Spirit will fill us with His life. And being full of His life will cause us to manifest His nature. True holiness and righteousness are a product of God's supernatural life. That we human beings can be filled with and animated by the life of Another is truly a wonderful thing.

We can allow a Higher life to take control of our mind, our feelings, and our decisions. We, who were born mere mortals, lower even than the angels, can receive an uncreated Life and actually have this Life live through us. Jesus can fill our being. We can become vessels which contain a great treasure. Instead of expressing ourselves and our fall-

en nature, we can allow Jesus to reveal Himself through us to the world. We can truly “live by” Him (Jn 6:57). Our responsibility, therefore, is to fill ourselves with this Life. True communion is an absolute necessity in the Christian life.

The Divine life manifests the Divine nature. It never can or will happen any other way. Only the life of God truly manifests His nature. Keeping the Old Testament law and the commandments can never arrive at this same goal. The reason for this is that these outward ordinances are “weak” (Rm 8:3) because they operate through the flesh.

Obedying the law requires the operation of your own will and determination. It requires your own efforts. It involves living by your own life. While a very strong person may be able to arrive at some semblance of “law keeping” and therefore an external righteousness, this does not satisfy the true requirements of God. We read that “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Rm 3:20).

Why not? It is because law keeping does not penetrate into the heart of man. It cannot change his true nature. Only the substitution, or the “exchange,” of our life for His can effect the changes which He truly desires.

IMITATING GOD?

The best we can do with our own efforts is arrive at sort of an imitation of God. Who wants an imitation? Certainly not God! He says that the righteousness which we can achieve with our own efforts appears as filthy rags to Him (Is 64:6).

In this context I am reminded of a picture I once saw in a magazine of a chimpanzee dressed up like a man. He had on a hat, a suit coat, and even a tie. He was smoking a big cigar. Now, even though he was dressed like a man, everyone could see that it was only a chimpanzee.

In the same way, many believers are trying very hard to act like God. They have a certain dress code. They wear their hair in a special way. They have a great variety of

things which they do or don't do to try to appear holy, just like God. But anyone with spiritual eyes can see that this is just chimpanzee Christianity. It is an imitation of the real thing. It is just a human being trying to dress and act like God. How silly this is!

Not only does this truth apply to keeping the law but it also applies to living by "New Testament" principles. While many Christians understand that keeping the law can never satisfy God, they instead are trying to live their life by following a whole set of New Testament principles.

They have studied the book from front to back and from it have synthesized a whole set of do's and don't's, should's and shouldn't's. In fact, there are Bible teachers traversing the country, if not the world, propagating exactly this kind of Christianity. They believe they are not "keeping the law" but have found a new way to please God, i.e. following New Testament principles.

Unfortunately, this method will never meet God's standard either. This, too, operates only through the efforts of the flesh. It too is chimpanzee Christianity. Our God is only satisfied with His son. He is the One with whom the Father is well pleased (Mt 17:5). It is only when He sees His son being manifested through us that He is content with what He sees. Only God's life manifests His nature.

In recent years there has been a campaign called "What would Jesus do?" Following this method, we are urged in every situation, before we act or speak, to stop and try to figure out what Jesus would do. Then we are instructed to try to act as He would.

The fact that people want to express Jesus is commendable. I don't want to be too negative. But the truth is that this method can never approach God's holy requirement. In the first place, how can we possibly know what Jesus would say or do in any given situation?

It is true that we have the New Testament where we can read about many things which Jesus said and did. However, one thing we discover there is that many times Jesus was unpredictable. What He said and did was very unexpected. It is impossible for us to anticipate or imitate

His words and actions. The second thing we learn is that He said and did everything by living by the Father. What we so desperately need today is not an imitation of God but an expression of God. What the world requires is to see God manifesting Himself through us. This can only be accomplished when we live by Another Life.

The Holy Spirit which God has given to us is not just some kind of additive. Many Christians seem to believe that while the Jews could never keep the law, as evidenced by Jewish history, Christians can, because they have a new fuel in their tank – the Holy Spirit. With this new additive, now they have the power to do what the Jews could never do without it.

Please understand this clearly: The Holy Spirit was not given to energize the flesh or strengthen the natural life so that it could live like God. This is far from the truth. Instead, the “spirit of life (ZOË) in Christ Jesus”(Rm 8:2), was sent as a replacement.

The old life, which we inherited from Adam, is defective. It cannot be fixed. It can and will sin as long as it is active. No amount of correction or suppression can change its nature. The nature of the old life is to sin. It must be replaced. The good news is that we can receive and live by another Life. This Life always expresses the Divine nature.

Some may then ask, of what use is the law? Why do we have written for us so many Old and New Testament principles? God has given us His law for a very important reason. It is to show us how far short of His righteousness we are. It is to convict us of sin. When we are acting in a way which does not manifest God, it will expose us. The law has its application for “the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for killers of fathers and killers of mothers, for murderers, for fornicators, for male homosexuals, for kidnapers, for liars, for perjurers” etc. (I Tim 1:9,10).

God’s standards have not been lowered. Just because we have “become dead to the law” (Rm 7:4), just because we have been forgiven, does not mean that we have been liberated to sin. NO! God’s standard of life is even higher.

What we are saying here is that the righteous requirement of God can never be met by the old life operating through the flesh, no matter how well-intentioned, self-controlled, or determined we might be. Only God's life can meet His standards. Only He is truly holy.

The law is a picture of God's holiness. It shows us, in a limited way, how pure He really is. Suppose I could show you a picture of my wife. You could see her hair color, her eyes and her beautiful face. But let us further suppose that I could bring her to meet you. How much more than her picture she is. She would be insulted if you continued gazing at her picture and paid no attention to her. She is the fulfillment of her picture.

In the same way, Christ is the fulfillment of the law. He is not less holy. He does not give us permission to sin. His intention is to fill us with Himself. He wants to live in us and through us in such a way that the law is a mere shadow of the righteousness which He will display through His people.

Dear friends, I pray that our Father will give you a complete understanding of these things. Truly it is a mystery. Mere words can never convey the magnitude of this revelation which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

My hope is that, in some way, through this writing you can be stimulated to seek for more of God and that you will enter into such an intimate communion with Him that, with time, you will be able to declare as Paul did: "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

5.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH

*I*n the past several chapters, we have been speaking about the fact that as Christians, we have two lives and two natures. From our father Adam, we received a natural, human life (PSUCHÊ, Greek) with a fallen, sinful nature. When we are “born again,” we receive from God the Father an uncreated life (ZOË, Greek) with the divine nature.

Every believer in Jesus has within his being two lives which manifest two different natures. Consequently, when we live by our natural life, we express our sinful nature and when we live by the new, divine life, we manifest the holy nature of God. It is here, then, that Christians encounter a dilemma. How is it possible to be full of and manifest the life of God? Furthermore, how is it possible to be free from the old life which is constantly producing sin?

In the last chapter we spoke of the necessity of communion with God in order to be full of His life. Here, we will focus on God’s wonderful plan to deliver us from sin.

To completely understand the plan, we need to fully comprehend the corruption of the human nature. When Adam and Eve partook of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, a profound change took place within them. The very nature of their lives was altered. They became sinful.

The human life within them – which before was pure and sinless – became polluted with sin. The fruit of the fallen life is sin. It is the spontaneous product of the fallen life which is within them.

Today men sin, not because they slip up once in a while and do something wrong, but because it is their nature to do so. What comes out of them is simply an expression of what is within them. Although the full expression of this sinfulness is kept somewhat in check by governments, pressure from others, and the human conscience, at various times in history this sin-principle has been unrestrained. Perhaps the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the more recent example of the Nazi "holocaust" will adequately illustrate this point.

Some may argue that man is not entirely sinful. Sometimes the natural man can produce some really laudable sentiments and actions. It is certainly true that men can and do exhibit good qualities, but sooner or later everyone does sin. It might be in some hidden, secret way, perhaps even only in their minds, but all men sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23).

If only we could see deeply into the heart of every man as God does, it is quite possible that we would find in every "good" thought or deed an element of self-satisfaction, pride, or selfish motivation. This taint of "self" disqualifies the person from being truly righteous as God is. The truth is that man is irreparably sinful.

Perhaps a good way to understand the problem would be to think of a pitcher full of fruit juice. This juice is healthy and delicious in every way. But let us suppose that someone comes along and drops just a little bit of poison into the juice. The whole container of juice becomes contaminated and undrinkable.

Theoretically, there is plenty of "good" juice in the pitcher. But all of it has become undrinkable. There is no way to safely separate the poison from the juice. The only solution is to throw the whole thing out. Depending on the container, even it, too, must be discarded.

When God created man, He gave them instructions concerning the tree of knowledge together with a stern warning. He said: "...in the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). God pronounced this sentence with good reason. To partake of this tree was to have

their natures changed, their lives polluted. The only solution to this sin problem is to eradicate the sinner. God said: "...in the day you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). The sinner, in order to sin no more, must surely die.

You see, there is no way to reform human nature. The sins which we do are a spontaneous result of the human life which we have. Since this life has fallen into sin, there is no way to fix it. As long as it exists, it will sin. It will stop sinning only when it dies.

In the universe which God created, this is the only way. The solution for sin is death. God's original pronouncement was and is true today. The Bible reads: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:20). This is God's judgment upon the sinner. His sentence upon such a person is death. This is the only possible way to rid humanity of sin. The race itself must be eliminated.

The contaminating poison cannot be separated from the juice. All must be thrown out. Paul, the apostle, confirms this truth in his own life by stating: "...we had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (II Cor 1:9).

THE DIVINE PLAN

In the preceding chapters, we have been seeing that God created man with a marvelous plan in mind. His divine desire was to create a creature in His image and likeness who would eventually receive His life and become His bride. With the fall of mankind, it appeared that this desire of our Lord's was thwarted. What had originally been pure and good had been contaminated with evil.

However, our God is extremely wise. Even before the foundation of the world, He foresaw that all of this would happen. With this foreknowledge, He planned and prepared a way to eventually accomplish all that was in His heart.

The first part of His plan which we have been understanding is that God has offered to human beings a substitute Life. This life of God (Eph 4:18) which we can receive

through Jesus Christ is truly the answer. It is this Life which pleases God and it is this Life which does not and, in fact, *cannot* sin. This is the ZOË Life about which we spoke in chapter 2.

The second part of the plan which we will be investigating here is how the old soul life with its old nature can be eliminated. (Let us be very clear here that we are not speaking about losing our physical life, but about our soul life or PSUCHË.)

There is only so much “room” in every human being. We cannot be filled to the brim with two “lives” at once. In order to be filled with God’s life (ZOË), we must be delivered from our own (PSUCHË). As we have been understanding here, the solution to the problem is death. Our soul life must surely die.

Here is an aspect of the gospel which all too few Christians understand. Many people receive Jesus with the hope of some great improvement in their lives. Perhaps they are led to believe that they will feel better, they will find the solution to all their problems, or even that they will become rich and prosperous. But the truth of God looms over them.

Jesus stated clearly, “If any man desires to come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24). This “taking up our cross” which Jesus mentions does not mean that we must carry around a couple of pieces of wood in a special shape. This cross is also not some jewelry which we wear. It is an instrument of torture and death. Notice please that this is “our cross.” It is we who must die.

In Jesus’ day, when you saw someone carrying a cross, he was never alone. He was always surrounded by a group of Roman soldiers. Furthermore, he was not roaming randomly around the town. He was going to a specific place with a specific destiny. He was going to be crucified and die. This is what Jesus meant when He told us that we must take up our cross in order to truly follow Him.

To receive God’s gift of Life and then follow Him means that you must die. Your soul life must be eliminated from the universe. This is the only solution for you. It is

an integral part of God's plan. Although we perhaps prefer to focus upon more agreeable things like the love of God, our death is also part of the gospel and to really understand the gospel, we must understand the aspect of death very clearly.

Have you really been convicted of sin? Do you really understand in the light of God how evil you are in your inward parts? Are you really repentant, not only for what you have done but also for what you are? When you received Jesus, did you do so with the understanding that it was the end of your own life?

If you cannot honestly answer "yes" to these questions, then your relationship with Jesus Christ is not being wholly beneficial to you. Since you have not really understood the gospel, you are in danger of missing most, if not all, of what God has in mind for you.

Let us take a little time here to speak of baptism. Clearly baptism is an integral part of the message which Jesus preached. We read: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mr 16:16). Paul and the other apostles also practiced baptism. But what does baptism mean? It means that we are ready to die. To be immersed under water is not a bath. It symbolizes drowning, dying.

We are baptized into Jesus' death (Rm 6:3). Our baptism signifies that we are confessing that we are worthy to die and that we are, in fact, ready and willing to experience the death which Christ has for us. It means that we have understood our sin and God's judgment upon it.

Our baptism testifies to the end of all that we were, are, or ever would want to be. We are agreeing with God's sentence of death and are ready for Him to apply it to us. If you have been baptized without this clear understanding and conviction, then you have truly missed the message of Jesus Christ.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Jesus said: "He who believes in me, even though he dies, he shall live" (Jn 11:25). Here is a great and important

mystery. In Jesus Christ, we can actually experience death yet still live. God's unalterable judgment that we must die can be executed upon us without eliminating us completely.

Our Father, in His great wisdom, has made a way for us to pass through death, yet not be destroyed. In Christ, what we are as a natural human being can be crucified and replaced with all that He is. We can pass through death into Life (I Jn 3:14).

Those who are in Christ Jesus do not bypass death. They pass through it. The necessity for God to eliminate sinners has not and cannot be changed. If He were to allow sinners to enter into His eternal kingdom, they would pollute the new world, just as they have polluted the old one. No amount of restraining or retraining the old nature will qualify it to enter into God's kingdom. It must be and will be totally eliminated.

Glory to God that He has made a way for us! In Him, we can experience both death and resurrection. Just as Noah in his ark passed through the judgment of God, yet was not killed, so in Christ we, too, can pass through death into Life.

You see, there can be no resurrection without first experiencing death. No living person can be resurrected. Therefore, if we wish to be filled with Christ's resurrection Life, we must first be "conformed to His death" (Phil 3:10). In order to be full of His life, we must also experience His death on the cross.

The cross of Christ is at the center of the gospel message. This Roman instrument of torture and death is at the core of Christianity. But what does it mean? It is not just a Christian symbol. It speaks of the termination of your life. It means the end of you. It means you are finished. Your hopes, your dreams, your opinions, desires, cares, plans, and future are all gone. You yourself, in fact, have been judged and crucified. There is no longer any room for your "self" in the universe of God.

And in your place is the Life of Another. Someone greater and more worthy than you is ready and willing to

fill your being with all that He is. No longer will it be you who is seen and heard. No longer will it be your will that is done. No longer will what you care about predominate. Instead, the God of the universe will use your mind, emotions, will, and even your body to do His will upon the earth.

When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, in some spiritual way, which is hard to understand, we also died with Him (Rm 6:4-6). When He was raised from the dead, we also were raised up with Him. The cross of Christ is a place of death and resurrection. It is there that an important exchange is made.

On the cross, we exchange all that we are for all that He is. Our soul-life with its sinful nature dies and His life with its holy nature lives in its place. We decrease and He increases (Jn 3:30). Our death with Him is a wonderful deliverance from what we are which makes room for the in-filling of all that He is.

If you are willing and ready for this, it is a great blessing and deliverance. But if you have not settled in your mind that this is what you need and want with all of your heart, then you will have great difficulty experiencing any spiritual progress. Without the experience of the cross, there is no true Christianity.

Without the death of Christ operating within us, there can be no genuine walk with the risen Lord. Only through the cross of Christ can we be free from what we are and be filled with what He is. It is the cross which brings us into God and God into us in a powerful, supernatural way. Without death, there can be no resurrection. (See Phil 3:10,11).

In order to walk in "newness of life," (ZOË) (Rm 6:4) we must first pass through death. This is not something that happens all at once. It is a gradual process. If we are willing to walk with Jesus, we will experience death every day.

Paul writes: "I die daily" (I Cor 15:31). As the life of God grows up within us, the experience of the cross deepens. We are "...always carrying about [while] in the body

the dying of the Lord Jesus, [so] that the Life of Jesus also might be manifested in our body" (II Cor 4:10).

The "application" or the experience of the cross of Jesus Christ – the execution of God's sentence – is made real to us through the Holy Spirit. It is not something which we can do to ourselves. No amount of effort will serve to alter the inner nature of our soul life. Even striving to "deny ourselves" will not arrive at the goal.

As we simply learn to walk in the Spirit day by day, all that is in Christ is made real to us. The death of Jesus on the cross becomes our daily experience as we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God that applies the death of Jesus to our natural life and nature. The Bible says: "...if by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live [have ZŌÊ Life]" (Rm 8:13).

This truth will help us understand the great need to be filled with God every day. Our natural abilities and strengths are of no use as long as they are under the control of our old PSUCHÊ life. Unless we are walking daily in the Holy Spirit and the light of God, we will never be free from what we are as natural men. We will never have a life of victory over sin. Only through the action of the Holy Spirit making the death of Christ real to us and in us will we have the daily experience of resurrection.

Here is the secret of true Christianity: the experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This secret was demonstrated by the three wise men who came to see the Lord at His incarnation. These wise men brought three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Myrrh is a spice which the men of that era used for embalming dead bodies. Therefore, this gift speaks of the death of Christ. Frankincense is an incense which, when burned, gives off a sweet smoke which ascends upward, pointing to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Gold is the only metal which does not oxidize (rust). It then represents for us here the incorruptible nature of God.

Joining all these things together gives us a marvelous picture. The experience of the death and resurrection of

Jesus brings us into the possession of the divine nature, the pure gold of all that He is.

THE OFFENSE OF THE CROSS

If you are reading this message and are in no way offended, perhaps you are not understanding what is being said. The preaching of the cross is truly an offense. It is a point of stumbling for many. When Jesus explained to the large crowd of His followers that He would be crucified, most of them left. They were offended with the idea of death. Jesus plainly tells us that He is a "...stone of stumbling and rock of offense" (Rm 9:33).

The very idea that what we are by nature can never be acceptable to God is a bitter pill to swallow. To admit that we are sinners and that we need to be replaced with Another is humbling to the greatest extent. Therefore, only those who humble themselves can ever enter into God's kingdom. Truly Jesus said: "...blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Mt 11:6).

The cross of Jesus Christ often causes offense. To yield unto death areas of our lives which we love and appreciate may be difficult in the extreme. What we are by nature, which may on the surface seem so good, is in reality a hindrance to God's best.

However, in the heat of our life situations this truth may be difficult to see. While there may be obvious problems in all of our lives which we are only too happy to be rid of, it is not uncommon to find that God wishes to slay something in us which we count precious. We must be ready for this. Our faith must rest in God, believing that He is able to raise up from the dead something much better than we have given to Him.

Unfortunately, many people walk only so far with Jesus. Although they may continue to be "good church members" and lead outwardly moral lives, inwardly they are resisting the Holy Spirit. They have gotten to some point which they refuse to yield to God and there they stay. In reality such people have stopped following the Lord.

These believers are in a very dangerous spiritual position. The hardening of a man's heart toward God can be so slow it is almost imperceptible. But in the end the result is destruction. Nothing of the old life will be able to endure in the presence of God. Our old, Adamic nature cannot inherit eternity.

The work which Jesus Christ did on the cross was complete. It is utterly sufficient to change us into His image from one degree of glory to another (II Cor 3:18). No part of our life has been labeled "too difficult." God has opened the way for us to be made entirely new.

However, this experience does require some of our own cooperation. God is not going to force us into anything. We must be willing to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross, and to follow Him. No doubt the old nature will resist this crucifixion. Many times everything within us will cry out that this is too much, this is too hard, this can't be God's way, this can't be "real Christianity."

The love of self is the enemy of the cross and therefore the enemy of Christ. To recognize it for what it is and to condemn it with the same judgment which God has passed upon it is the only way we will be able to walk in newness of life and resurrection power.

When Jesus was explaining to the disciples that He must die, Peter, one of His most ardent followers, argued with Him saying: "Lord, this shall not happen to you" (Mt 16:22). In other words, he was saying: "Don't be so hard on yourself. Surely you don't need such a drastic solution."

This is often our response today too. We think that to experience the cross is too hard, too difficult. Surely in the love of God He must have an easier way. But what was Jesus' response to such a plea for self pity? He said, "Get behind me Satan... for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mt 16:23). God's solution for sin is death. Jesus died in our place, so that in Him we could pass through death and into Life.

Some Christians mistakenly think that Jesus was the "second Adam," thus indicating that He came to start over and do a better job where Adam failed. However, this is

not the case. Jesus Christ was the "last Adam" (I Cor 15:45). When Jesus came to this earth, in God's eyes the race of Adam ended. Fallen, sinful humankind was finished. The Most High's judgment upon them was being carried out. When we enter into Jesus, we become part of a new race of beings. We become a new kind of creature (II Cor 5:17).

Now we are of the divine race. We have become the "sons of God" (Gal 4:6). The old Adamic race is past and a newly generated type of being is coming into its own. Although this work is happening in secret, someday when the sons of God are manifested (Rm 8:19), all that has been done through Christ will be revealed.

A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

Now I would like to take a little space here to address a common misunderstanding. Sometimes in the New Testament these truths concerning the cross and our becoming new creatures are stated as if they had already happened. Some translations of Galatians 2:20 read: "I have been crucified with Christ," which seems to indicate a work which is already done. Colossians 3:3 states: "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

There certainly is a sense in which this is true because when Christ died His work was completed. He said: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). However, this can cause confusion in believers' minds. Many do not realize that this crucifixion must be made real to them. They do not understand that biblical truths are of no value to them unless they enter into the experience of them through the Holy Spirit.

Some mistakenly think if they simply "believe" that they are already changed completely, then they are. Others imagine that since they have been forgiven, everything is now O.K., not realizing that this was just the beginning and that God still has important work to do in them.

The truth is that unless we enter into the experience of these things, they will do us absolutely no good. For example, Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world but only those who enter into Him through faith are benefited

by it. In the same way, the fact that we have died with Christ and have been raised with Him will do us no good whatsoever unless we through faith and obedience enter into the reality of it. It is not enough spiritually speaking to simply claim our "position in Christ." That "position" *must* become our experience.

This truth can be compared to the experience of the Children of Israel. They could have stayed on the east side of the Jordan river instead of crossing over into the good land. There they might have spent their time praising and thanking God for his wonderful gift of the good land. They might have done a lot of teaching and preaching about what a great place the other side was, yet never crossing over into it and taking possession of it.

Sadly, this is exactly how many, many believers behave today. If we do not enter into this good land which God has given us and possess it, then even though it is ours in theory, we will not obtain it. We must by faith in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ yield ourselves daily unto His death so that He can raise us up to walk in newness of Life.

WHY DO WE SUFFER?

It is obvious from a careful reading of the New Testament that suffering is a large part of the Christian experience. Although some would like to try and eliminate suffering from the gospel, it is clearly written about in each book of the New Testament. Since Christ already suffered and died for us, why is it necessary for us to suffer? Once again, this has to do with our entering into the experience of Christ.

The Bible reads: "...he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (I Pet 4:1). Peter teaches us that we are "...partakers of Christ's sufferings" (I Pet 4:13). Paul states that we "...are partakers of the sufferings" (II Cor 1:7) and that he was entering into the "...fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil 3:10).

These and many other verses clearly show that followers of Jesus Christ will experience sufferings, not only from

the devil but also from the hand of God. Why is this necessary and how does it work?

One important reason God allows suffering is to bring about change in our lives. Everyone in the world suffers in some way or another, yet they are not changed into the image of Christ. But the suffering which God allows serves a very important purpose for those who are entering into Life.

The difficulties and pain through which we pass in this life work in us to expose sin. When we suffer, our reaction to it is very often sinful. We complain; we become impatient and lose our temper; we become whining, self-centered individuals. We become angry, bitter, unloving, and hateful. Our severest difficulties bring up from deep within us all kinds of ungodliness. Suddenly our own righteousness and goodness doesn't work any more.

For example, when someone else has caused you extreme emotional or physical pain for many years, sooner or later your own strength to endure runs out. You just can't take it anymore. Your heart changes toward them. You would just like to kill them.

Therefore, in your heart, you have become a murderer. No, wait! You have not *become* a murderer, you always were one, it was just hidden within you from yourself and others. This and many other similar reactions are exposed within us by the operation of suffering.

Unless and until we have really suffered, we do not truly see what we are like within. God, however, knows what lies within our hearts. Therefore, He allows us to suffer to expose to us what He already sees. Suffering is God's backhoe. Through it, He digs in our hearts to reveal the depths of evil which reside there.

Often we are tempted to think that we are not really "that type of person;" it is just the sufferings of our situation which have caused us to become like that.

My friend, let me tell you a secret. Nothing can come out of your heart that is not already in there. It is "...out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Lk 6:45). We sin, because sin lives in our hearts. It is our nature to

sin. In every human being lies secretly hidden the most repulsive of reactions and desires. All it needs is the proper opportunity to express itself. Just because you might abhor what you see does not mean that it is “not really you.”

Murder, lust, hate, unclean passion, gossip, lying, greed, pride, jealousy, and many more detestable things live in every natural man. If you do not know this about yourself, then you have not yet really suffered and have not had the opportunity to really repent before God for what you are.

Suffering then brings us the opportunity to die. When sin is exposed within us, we then have the wonderful opportunity to deny ourselves. We can deny our self life the right to express its natural reaction to our situation. We can, through the Holy Spirit, die to self and live to God.

This is how suffering can work for our good. When we suffer and find within ourselves ungodly reactions, we can cry out to God and ask that He would substitute what He is for what we are seeing that we are. We can fervently pray that we would not be allowed to live and express such vileness, but that He would live in and through us.

We grow spiritually not merely by suffering but by turning to God in the middle of our suffering. Through the operation of the Holy Spirit, the death of Christ can be applied to our old life (PSUCHÊ) and a new eternal Life (ZOË) can live in its place. Jesus has already passed through death for us. When we enter into Him – that is we enter into His presence by the Spirit in the middle of our sufferings – there we will find His resurrection glory.

There is often a great temptation when we suffer to arrange for our own deliverance, to find a way of escape from the “situation” which is causing us pain. And, as Peter with the Lord, there will always be some well-meaning person nearby to encourage us to do just that.

How easy it would be to just climb down off the cross and to spare our natural life suffering and death. How easy it is to “get that divorce” or move away from an uncomfortable situation. However, if we take this way, we will

never enter into all the fulness of Christ and His resurrection glory. The choice is ours to make every day. Let us never blame our situation for what our reaction to it might be.

THE LAMB OF GOD

When the Lord Jesus was tested, nothing impure was found. Before the Jews could sacrifice a lamb, it was necessary for the priests to examine it for any defects. So too, before Jesus was sacrificed for us, it was necessary for Him to be looked over for any flaws. Pontius Pilate examined Him. Herod, too, had his opportunity. The Roman soldiers took every possible chance to test and try the Son of God.

He was mocked, beaten, stripped naked, tortured, and finally killed. During all this time, He never uttered even one single wrong word. Not one evil attitude was expressed. Not even one expression of His face revealed hatred or revenge.

This One was truly holy. Nothing sinful lurked within Him; therefore, nothing evil could come out of Him. He had passed the test. Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man" (Lk 23:4). I'm sure he could not have said this about any other man.

Herod gave up trying and sent Him back to Pilate. The leader of the soldiers, who no doubt had seen many other men crumple under such torture, testified: "Truly this was the son of God" (Mt 27:54). Here was a perfect, sinless man.

Dear friends, this is the Christ that lives in every believer. His life is in us and He greatly desires to be expressed through us in every situation of our lives. The only obstacle is us.

Are we ready and willing to die to ourselves and be filled with Him? Are we willing to be rid of what we are to receive what He is? He will do nothing within us without our complete, total permission. We must be ready to die, to take up our cross and follow Him.

Let us agree with God's sentence of death upon the fallen race. Let us through Jesus, allow Him to execute His

judgment upon it. Only then will we be in a position to experience all that He is.

Only when we have experienced the death of Christ working thoroughly within us and the resurrection of Christ flowing through us will we be able to say with Paul, "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). This must not remain merely our doctrine but must become our experience!

6.

THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL

*I*n the preceding chapters of this book, we have been investigating the eternal plan of God, which is to prepare a bride for Himself. We have seen that man was created in His image and likeness to ultimately fulfill this holy purpose.

In order to comprehend this design more completely, it will be necessary for the reader to understand not only why God made man, but how He made him. Truly we were “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). From this vantage point, we will then go on to speak further about the holy work which He is doing in every one of His children.

As the children of God, we are not supposed to walk in darkness. It is our Father’s will that we have spiritual understanding about what is going on in our lives, both around us and within us. It is important for us to understand how the Holy Spirit is working to transform us and so to be able to cooperate with Him in His important work.

Therefore, we will spend a little time here in this writing to lay some groundwork for our discussion in later chapters. Some very basic revelations need to be implanted in us, some foundation stones as it were, in order for us to walk in light and understanding. Some of you readers perhaps have already been taught these things, and so they

may serve as a kind of review. For others, hopefully they will become fundamental building blocks to go on to a greater degree of maturity in Christ.

Our God is a living God. He has no interest in being confined to a physical temple made with human hands. Perhaps dead, lifeless images have their place in lifeless buildings, but our God, who created the universe and is ever living, has no interest in being limited to an earthly structure.

Instead, His marvelous, eternal plan includes the idea of living inside human beings. They, being sanctified and cleansed by His Spirit, are being fashioned into a dwelling place for Himself. The Bible clearly teaches that we, God's people, are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 3:16).

By living in and through living beings, our Creator can express Himself in an infinite variety of ways. Therefore, when we speak of the temple of God today and in the future, we must always keep in mind that we are really speaking about God's New Covenant people – His Church.

Equipped with this understanding, we can now look at the Old Testament tabernacle and temple in a new light. In the final analysis, God did not design these structures (or allow them to be built) as any kind of permanent dwelling place for Himself. Instead, they must be understood as symbols of and sources of great revelation concerning His ultimate dwelling – His holy people.

Over the centuries during which the Christian church has been in existence, many of God's people have received various revelations concerning the Old Testament tabernacle. Some have seen it as a type of Christ. Others have understood that it is a prefiguring of the gospel or the message of redemption.

I'm quite sure that the totality of the revelation contained in this holy structure will never be understood by any one man in this life. However, I am equally certain that when God gave instructions for this tabernacle, He had in mind His future dwelling place – His Church. Therefore, when we examine this "tent of meeting" in detail we

undoubtedly can discover something about man and how God made him to fulfill His designs. Through the tabernacle, we can learn something about ourselves and about how and why God is working in us and through us.

With this in mind, when we look at the tabernacle which Moses built, one feature stands out: That is that this structure is composed of three parts: an "outer court," the "holy place," and the "holy of holies." Although there are various pieces of furniture and other fixtures mentioned relating to different functions and ceremonies, these three distinct divisions form the basis for the structural plan.

Significantly, when we take a closer look at man, the present and future temple, he also is divided into three main parts: body, soul, and spirit. This truth that man is made in three parts is confirmed in the New Testament where we read: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thess 5:23 KJV).

Interestingly, in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written, the word "and" separating "spirit *and* soul *and* body" is included, plainly making the distinction between them. Some Bible teachers have erred, trying to make man into only two parts, body and soul for example. But the Scriptures are clear: the tabernacle has three parts and so does man – body and soul and spirit.

Some confusion has been generated by the use of the words "heart" and "flesh" in the Bible, seemingly introducing other "parts." However, we need not be confused by this. The "heart of man" is simply the parts which are not seen. The Holy Word uses the word "heart" of man to refer to the inner parts of man, the soul and/or the soul and spirit together.

The word "flesh" signifies the fallen, sinful parts of man, sometimes only the body, but most often the body and the soul together. This word then refers to one or both of the two "more outward" parts, i.e. the soul and/or the body. The words "heart" and "flesh" are more general in their usage since they refer to more than one "part."

As you can see, there is some overlap in this terminology and therefore it can become confusing. However, if we think of the temple of God and its three divisions as corresponding to the three primary parts of man – body, soul, and spirit – there need be no misunderstanding.

THE WORD “SALVATION”

In the interest of complete clarity and a true understanding of biblical revelation, we must now spend a little time examining the word “salvation.” Please pay careful attention to this discussion. Most Christians believe that they already know what the word salvation means but, in fact, very few have a proper understanding of it.

Almost all believers today equate the word “salvation” with being “born again.” To them, these words are synonymous in their meaning and usage. They take the words “being saved” and being “born again” to mean exactly the same thing. However, in the Bible, these words often have very different meanings. Please do not be surprised by this, but simply read along here and you too will see how the Scripture often uses these words and phrases to mean very different things.

Perhaps the best way to understand the biblical meaning of “salvation” or “being saved” is to realize that this word is used in the Holy Text to express three different periods of time. It is used in three different ways. We could think of these as three different verb tenses: the past tense, the present tense and the future tense. This would translate something like this: we “have been saved,” we “are being saved” and we “will be saved.”

In fact, in the Greek language in which the New Testament was written, this is exactly the case. There, we can find verbs relating to “salvation” occurring in these three forms: the past tense, the present tense (with incomplete action still going on), and the future tense.

Significantly, the way these verb tenses are used corresponds directly with the three parts of man about which we have been speaking. As we all know, mankind has fall-

en into sin. Due to this fall, the human race needs to be saved, not only a little saved, but saved completely – body, soul, and spirit. Through time, our God is accomplishing His salvation work in every part of our being.

SALVATION OF THE BODY

Perhaps the clearest and easiest way to begin is to speak about the “third” or most visible part of our being, our body. When Jesus died on the cross, He purchased for every believer a complete salvation. Not even our physical body was left out. However, this “salvation” of our body has not yet been manifested. It is something in the future.

Someday our mortal body will be glorified. It will be “saved.” It will be changed to be like the immortal, glorious body of our risen Lord. This is probably what Peter the apostle is referring to when he speaks of a “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet 1:5). Here Peter speaks about a future salvation which is not yet manifested.

Since being “born again” has already been revealed, it is evident that he is addressing something else. Paul also alludes to the future salvation of the body when he says, “...for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11).

When Jesus Christ comes in His glory with His angels, the dead in Christ will be raised up and changed in a glorious way (II Cor 5:1-4, I Cor 15:38-55, Rom 8:23). This is a part of our salvation. However, its realization is not in the past, nor in the present, but in the future.

SALVATION OF THE SPIRIT

Next, we will speak about the “first” part of our being, our spirit. When God created man, He breathed into him the breath (or “spirit”) of life. (In both the Hebrew and Greek language, the word for breath and spirit is the same.)

This, then, is the source of man’s human spirit, the breath or “Spirit” of God. This “organ,” the human spirit,

was designed by God to be the leading element of man's being. It is the part which is made to have communion with God and was intended to be the primary or chief part inside of us.

The moment Adam and Eve sinned against God, something within them died. Not only did they begin to die physically, but also something inside of them changed.

It is impossible for us to know exactly what did happen, but we can see that in some way their human spirit was deadened and darkened. Their once sweet fellowship with God was interrupted. Some kind of spiritual darkness descended upon them and their lives were radically changed. This loss was devastating. Obviously, this "part" of man also needs saving.

When a man or woman believes into Jesus Christ, a wonderful salvation occurs. The Spirit of God enters into their human spirit and an eternal union is made. The Bible reads: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit [with the Lord]" (I Cor 6:17). In another place we are told: "...that which is born of the Spirit [i.e. the Spirit of God] is spirit [i.e. the human spirit]" (Jn 3:6).

The joining of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit effects the new birth. We are "born from above" when we receive God's Spirit into our spirit. What a wonderful thing has happened to us! The Spirit of God has entered into our spirit and we have become a new kind of heavenly creature. The union of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit creates a new spiritual being (II Cor 5:17).

Being "born again" is the first event in a genuine Christian experience. This initial step, involving faith, repentance, and receiving the Spirit of God is how we enter into God's eternal family. As we have seen in chapter 2, this means that we have received God's own eternal Life.

Just as a child is born into a natural family by receiving the life of its parents so we, too, when we are born again, become "babes in Christ," the immature children in God's family. This experience is immediate; that is, it happens all at once. Perhaps it takes minutes or seconds, but it is very analogous to a physical birth.

This then is what most people mean when they speak of “being saved.” This word “saved” is most often used in the past tense by people when they say: “I have been saved” or when we ask: “When were you saved?” By this they really mean to say, “I have been born again” or “When did you experience the new birth.”

At least once in the New Testament, in the original Greek language in which it was written, the word salvation is clearly used in the past tense referring to our present subject. Romans 8:24 reads: “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”

In this passage, the word “saved” is being used to refer to our new birth, an event which is in the past for every true Christian. Here the word “saved” occurs in the past tense, indicating a work already completed.

AN ONGOING WORK

Significantly, the word “salvation” or “being saved” is most often used in the New Testament to describe a present and ongoing work. Frequently, it is used in a context or in a verb form which indicates that it is a work still in progress. For example, when we read that we must “...work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), this indicates that something is still going on. Here we see clearly that although we have been born again, there is still a part of our salvation which we need to “work out.”

Demonstrating a similar thought, Peter rejoices that they (and we) will be: “...receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls” (I Pet 1:9). Here he is showing that the full salvation of the soul is something we realize at the completion of a spiritual life of faith instead of something we get at the beginning. So we see that there is a third way in which the word “salvation” is used in the Scriptures, representing a present continuing work.

Another verse which states in a very clear manner the truth that there is today an ongoing salvation for believers

beyond the new birth is found in Romans 5:10. Here we read: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, *much more*, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." You see here, "reconciliation" has occurred. The new birth has been effected. Yet the salvation process is still continuing.

Still another verse which shows that salvation is an ongoing process is I Corinthians 1:18. Here we read: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who *are being saved* it is the power of God."

Many may read this passage with the mentality of a salvation as being a "one-time only" event and therefore misread it as "to us who are being born again." However, the wording here clearly indicates a work in progress. Paul and the readers of this epistle had already experienced the new birth. Here he is referring to their ongoing experience of God's amazing grace.

This truth that the salvation process can be a continuing thing is somewhat obscured in the English language by our lack of verb forms. According to the authors of the *Concordant Literal Translation*, in the Greek New Testament there is a verb form which indicates not a completed act, but an action which is incomplete and still going on.

Therefore, many places in the English versions where we read the words "be saved," or "are saved" actually should be translated as "be being saved," or "are being saved." Since "be being saved" is awkward in English, most Bible translators render these occurrences as "be saved," thus implying a completed work. Unfortunately, in so doing, they also obscure the truth revealed in God's word.

Please allow me to cite several well-known passages of the New Testament using this different verb form indicated in the *Concordant Literal Translation* so that you can see what I mean. When Jesus was preaching and answering the accusations of the Jews, He said: "I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you *may be being saved*" (Jn 5:34), thus indicating a continuing work. In

Romans 5:9 we read: "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall *be being saved* from wrath through Him."

Again in I Corinthians 15:1,2 it states: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you *are being saved*, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain."

According to the Concordant authors, these words "be being saved" indicate an incomplete, continuing action and are found in the following verses: Mk 16:16, Lk 8:12, Jn 3:17, 10:9, Acts 2:21, 11:14, 16:31, Rm 5:9,10, 10:13, I Cor 10:33, 15:2, and I Thess 2:16. Keeping in mind the idea of a continuing action conveyed by "be being saved," please take some time to review all these verses to give yourself a new and truer understanding of the gospel.

Although in many of these and other verses the word "salvation" often appears in our translations as if it were in the past tense, that is not the correct rendering of these verb tenses from the original Greek language.

So we see that although many, many believers use the term "salvation" to refer only to the new birth, this is not the way it is primarily used in the New Testament.

SALVATION OF THE SOUL

As you might have guessed, this ongoing process of "salvation" is something which is happening in our "second part," our soul. When we are born again, our first "part," our spirit, is saved. In the future when Jesus returns in glory, our third "part," our body, will be saved. But today God is doing an ongoing work in our second "part," our soul.

This truth is clearly seen in Heb 10:39 where we read: "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition [destruction], but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." This is an essential truth which has been sadly neglected and misunderstood by the Church of our day. The salvation of the soul is not an event. It is a process to which all of us need to give serious attention.

Going back to God's analogy of the Tabernacle, we see that the Spirit of God enters into our human spirit and resides there. It is here that the presence of God dwells permanently. He does not come and go.

Whether we "feel" this presence or not, once we have received Him, God dwells within His holy temple in our spirit. But on the day when Jesus was crucified, something amazing happened. The veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top to the bottom.

The result was that the presence of God was no longer "confined" to the inner Holy of Holies, but was "free" to move out into the Holy Place. Within us this means that God is not confined only to our spirit but can and will fill our soul with His presence.

Perhaps you readers will remember from chapter 2 our discussion of three Greek words for "life:" BIOS, PSUCHÊ and ZOÊ. There we learned that ZOÊ is the word for God's eternal, uncreated life and that PSUCHÊ is the word used for our old, fallen "soul life." Here we arrive at a point in our teaching where this distinction becomes very important.

Since the "spirit of life [ZOÊ] in Christ Jesus" (Rm 8:2) is now in our spirit, it is evident that we have a supernatural, eternal life in our inmost part. But in our soul, we still have a created, natural, sinful life, PSUCHÊ. The inner part is holy but the outer one remains sinful.

How many of us can testify to this in our experience! Like Paul, we have a holy desire in the inner man, but find ourselves practicing sin with our "outer" man. (See Rm (7:15). God's solution to this dilemma is what we will now be investigating.

A GLORIOUS SUBSTITUTION

God's plan is to substitute, little by little, His glorious eternal life for our earthly corrupted one. This is what the term "the salvation of the soul" means. When we give the Holy Spirit opportunity, He "spreads" from the inner sanc-

tum of our spirit into our soul and gradually makes this essential substitution.

The more we open our being to Him, the more He takes the opportunity to fill us with what He is. The more frequently and the more deeply we allow the Spirit access to our soul, the more profoundly we are changed. The Bible calls this process "transformation" or "sanctification." Obviously, the more we are changed or "transformed" into His image, the more sanctified or holy we become. These two things, sanctification and transformation, are part of the wonderful work called "the salvation of the soul."

Perhaps a good analogy for this might be the formation of petrified wood. Wood, in its natural state is susceptible to decay and deterioration and is able to be burned. But in certain circumstances, when a piece of wood falls into water, another process occurs.

Little by little, the natural elements of the wood are washed away and various minerals are deposited in their place. The water saturates and permeates the wood, slowly removing the original ingredients, but preserving the outward appearance. I am told that not only are the growth rings in a tree preserved, but even the cellular structure is still visible under a microscope.

Thus, the wood is changed from being perishable to being "eternal" from a human point of view. It will no longer decay and has become "fireproof."

In a similar way, when we allow Him to do so, the Holy Spirit will saturate and permeate every corner of our soul. Little by little, He will wash away the old natural elements of corruption and decay and substitute His own eternal life and nature for ours.

We will be sanctified and purified by the washing of water in the word (Eph 5:26). The result is that we become "eternal" and, as we will see later on, "fireproof" as well. God does not change the external "structure" of our being, only the contents. We become different people inwardly. Instead of being motivated by a sinful, PSUCHE life, we become dominated by a righteous, ZOE life.

This is not to say that we will become some kind of different personality than we were before or that we will become someone who we are not. Instead, we find that we become who we were really made to be. We become the kind of person that fits perfectly with our personalities and capabilities. We become what our Creator really intended for us.

As an analogy, let us say that God does not take a green stone and make it red. Instead, He takes an opaque green stone and purifies it until it becomes transparent. Then our soul (the stone in our analogy) can freely exhibit all that God is within us, shining out through the “color” of who He made us to be.

We will have been purified of all obstructions, made transparent like the bride of Christ (Rev 21:11), so that He can be seen in us in all His glory in a special way in which only we can exhibit Him.

GROWTH IN LIFE

When Jesus was incarnated here on earth, He was born in a lowly, dirty place – in a stable and in a manger. So, too, when we are born again by having the Life of God born in us, Jesus again humbles Himself to enter a lowly place.

Yet He did not remain in the manger for long. He grew in “wisdom and stature” (Lk 2:52). He grew to manhood and maturity and also in usefulness to His heavenly Father. In the same way, the eternal Life of God grows up within believers who are seeking and obeying the Lord. It is as this Life matures that they also become increasingly useful to God.

You see, our Lord’s desire is not to have an eternal nursery full of spiritual babies who constantly need time, care, and attention. He is seeking mature sons and daughters who can be of use to Him here on the earth to accomplish His eternal purposes.

There is an urgent need for all of God’s children to grow to spiritual maturity. Our testimony to the world is not merely in words, it is also in the attitudes and actions

which we express. Our “witness” is not only what we say, but also what we are.

What the world needs is Jesus. He is the answer to their needs. But where are people going to find Him? How are the unsaved going to know what He is like? Only through His being exhibited through His people. And how will they know that He indeed can save them? Only by seeing that He has delivered others from what they were and changed them into His likeness. This requires that we grow in God’s Life so that His nature can be expressed through us.

Think about it. If you are preaching to others that Jesus saves, but you yourself still manifest the fallen nature, where is your testimony that what you say is true? Where is the power of what you preach? If His salvation is obviously not working in your life – if you are not being transformed and freed from sin – why should anyone else pay attention to what you say? Why would they want what you have since it evidently is not working for you?

As with all living things, growth takes time. Just as it is in the physical world, so it is in the spiritual one. There is no such thing as instantaneous maturity. Growth in life takes time and nourishment. This is especially true of the larger, more impressive of the plant species, giant trees. To reach maturity, they require hundreds of years of growth. Only the soft, insubstantial mushroom grows overnight. These things should be instructive for us.

To grow spiritually also takes time and nourishment. It will never happen instantaneously. It requires attention to seek, obey and know more and more intimately the Lord Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:2 reads: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby *unto salvation*” (NASB).

It is clear here that our ongoing salvation is the result of a growth process aided by spiritual nourishment. Further, we are instructed in God’s word to grow. Paul urges us to “...grow up in all things into Him” (Eph 4:15).

This is not a small thing, brothers and sisters. We have been offered the fullness of God. He has held nothing back.

He has shed His blood to open the way for us. He has poured out His Holy Spirit to make all that He is available to us. We, small insignificant human beings, have been offered the opportunity to fill ourselves to overflowing with the God of the universe.

But are we availing ourselves of the opportunity? Are we using our time to seek and knock and ask until we are satisfied that we have received all that is possible? The Galatians were rebuked by Paul for their lack of maturity. He says: "My little children, for whom I labor in birth [pains] again, until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19).

You see, these were "church members." They were already born again. Yet they were failing to yield themselves to God and seek Him in a way that would lead to the full "formation" of Christ within them. Although they had already received Christ, He was not yet fully formed in them. They were neglecting a great salvation which Jesus had purchased for them (Heb 2:3).

The best way to grow spiritually and thereby enter into the salvation that is ours by virtue of being God's children is to spend time in His presence in the Scriptures. II Timothy 3:15 reads: "...you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Dear friends, the table of God is spread. His feast has been made ready. All that is lacking is for those who are called to use their time and attention to fill themselves, more and more, again and again until the day of His coming.

Nothing is lacking but our own desire and willingness. In this way we will be "...receiving the end of [our] faith, the [complete] salvation of [our] souls" (I Pet 1:9). Please notice here that this complete salvation is "the end" or the goal of our faith, not the beginning.

Truly, "He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely] those who come to God through Him" (Heb 7:25). You see, the new birth is the beginning of our faith but the end is the full salvation of our souls. What could be more precious and valuable than this?

The salvation of the soul is an essential part of a Christian experience. It is a process through which every believer needs to pass. No one is exempt. As we have been seeing, it is not sufficient simply to be "born again." We not only need to experience salvation in our spirit but it is imperative that we go on to receive all that Jesus has purchased for us: the salvation of the soul.

This experience includes such things as "transformation," "sanctification," "growing in the Lord," "purification," and the "renewing of the mind." The way this happens is mysterious. It is not possible to explain the mechanics of it in a mental, analytical way. We only know that it occurs as we day by day give ourselves completely to Him. It occurs as His Life grows within us.

As we spend time in His presence beholding His glory, we are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory by His Spirit (II Cor 3:18). This is not a promise for the future but something which we need to be experiencing day by day. It is not only for a few "mystics" but for all of God's children.

Those who are following the Lord should be experiencing this glorious transformation. If we are not, then there is something lacking in our Christianity. This internal changing or "transforming" of our souls is the revealed will of God for us. It is for all believers. Therefore, all of us need to seek Him until we have the assurance that these real, eternal changes are happening in us today.

The ongoing process of the salvation of the soul is something we must experience in this life. When Jesus comes again, there will be no second chance. As we have seen, there is no such thing as instantaneous transformation later. Today we have a choice. Today we can lay aside the sin and whatever else is holding us back and run after Jesus. Tomorrow there will be no excuses. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor 6:2).

7.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

*I*n Christianity today there are generally two schools of thought concerning the subject of salvation. One group of Christians believes that you can lose your salvation. Those who hold this belief think that you can “get saved” or born again and then later on because of sin, lose your salvation.

Many of them also believe that you can “get saved” again if and when you repent. This process can be repeated any number of times. This view was propagated many years ago by a man named Jacobus Arminius, forming a part of what is known as “Arminianism.” This doctrine is usually held by the Pentecostal or Charismatic churches.

The second school of thought on the subject of salvation is that once you are born again, you are “saved,” and nothing you or anyone else can do will change that fact. If you sin or if you fall away, none of this has any impact upon your eternal security. They feel that you cannot “lose” your salvation.

Further, they teach that there are few if any consequences for your actions. Once you receive Jesus you are going to heaven and that is that. This view was expounded by John Calvin and so forms part of “Calvinism.” This is the position of most Fundamentalist churches.

Interestingly, both camps produce some very significant and convincing scriptures to prove their case. Each side cites verses which seem to prove what they teach.

However, from the preceding chapter we see that each side of this debate is making a fundamental error. They are arguing their points from scripture as if "salvation" was the same as being "born again." They have not seen that biblical salvation is not merely the new birth but a life-long process of being changed from glory to glory into the image of Christ Jesus. (If you have any confusion about this, please review chapter 6 regarding "The Salvation of the Soul," for a more complete explanation of this truth).

Since their basis is faulty, their conclusions can only be partially accurate. By trying to make "salvation" exactly the same thing as the new birth, many incorrect conclusions can be reached or even "proven" from the scriptures.

But when you read the Bible while keeping in mind the understanding that our salvation is a progressive work, many scriptures make more sense. Much confusion is resolved simply by understanding that "salvation" is more than a one-time event, but also a process by which we are transformed.

As we are seeing, both of the views stated above have missed something very important. But we also need to see that both also contain a good deal of truth when seen in the proper light. *All* the scriptures used by both sides of this debate are true. God made no mistakes when writing His holy book. For a better understanding of this, please pay careful attention to the following statements.

The salvation you have received from God is indeed eternal and you cannot lose it. But, the salvation which you have not yet experienced you will lose, if you do not press on to enter into it. You see, both things can be and are true. You cannot lose and yet you can lose your salvation.

The problem is that people have defined "salvation" simply as "being born again," but in the Bible and in the mind of God there is much more to it than that. Biblical salvation is God's complete work in and for man, beginning with His cleansing and the experience of the new birth,

continuing with the transformation of the soul and ending with the glorification of the body.

ETERNAL SALVATION

What you have gained of eternal (ZOË) life is indeed eternal. How can we be sure of that? It is because by definition what God is, is absolutely indestructible. He is eternal and immutable. If you have allowed the Eternal One into your spirit and been “joined” to Him (I Cor 6:17), there is no way to lose or destroy this fact. We must remember that it is *His* life which we have received, not an extension of our own.

In our known universe which God created, a life can only be lost in one way. It does not evaporate or leak out of us. It does not just disappear. There is only one way to get rid of any kind of life, that is to kill it.

But you see, God’s life is impossible to kill. The Jews and the Roman soldiers tried, but it was impossible for death to hold Him (Acts 2:24). Since it is through God’s eternal life that we have been re-born, it is something eternal which cannot be lost or destroyed. God’s life will not just disappear out of you. It has actually been born inside of you, creating a new kind of being. This creature is eternal just as its Father is eternal. We have truly become the children of God, being begotten by him (I Pet 1:3).

If we imagine that eternal life is simply a grant that God has given us so that we would live longer, then theoretically, this could be rescinded or revoked if we do not behave. But instead, since it is an actual impartation of the Divine Life which is impossible to kill – a true new birth, the generation of His life inside of us – then we are forced to conclude that this is an eternal, irrevocable event.

Furthermore, what has been saturated and permeated with His life and divine nature has become eternal also and therefore absolutely indestructible. In other words, the “parts” of our soul which we have yielded to God and He has truly transformed are also eternal. Hebrews 5:9 teaches us that God’s salvation, His work in our soul, is indeed

eternal. We read: "And having been perfected, He became the author of *eternal salvation* to all who obey Him." The word "eternal" means exactly that, eternal.

HE WHO SAVES HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT

But, on the other hand, if we have not allowed God to fill us and change us, there remains in our being much which is not indestructible. We then still have in our soul that which is natural, sinful, and "unsaved." This of course is very destructible and, in fact, needs to be destroyed.

If we refuse to allow the Holy Spirit access to all of our soul, if we resist the discipline and work of God within us, this part which remains old and natural will be lost. Please pay careful attention to this: any untransformed parts of our soul will be lost when Jesus returns. When Jesus comes again, our time for transformation is finished. Then what we have gained will be ours but what we have not gained will be lost, since there will be no second opportunity to gain it.

How can we know this? It is what Jesus plainly taught while He was on the earth. He said: "Whoever desires to save his life shall lose it" (Mt 16:25 also Mt 10:39, Lk 9:24, 17:33, Jn 12:25).

The word "life" here is PSUCHÊ or "soul life." So we see that if we hold onto our soul life, if we refuse to let the death and resurrection of Christ operate in all of us, then this part of us will be lost. This is something beyond dispute. Significantly, this verse is recorded five times in the Bible. Nothing could be clearer. If you love yourself, and resist the transforming, purifying work of the Holy Spirit within you, then this natural PSUCHÊ life will be lost!

This does not refer to your physical life. It does not mean physical death. It is not talking about being a martyr. It means your soul. In fact, some translations say just this: "He who saves his *soul* will lose it." The actual translation of the Greek is PSUCHÊ, our "soul life" .

The natural, sinful elements which remain in your being will be consumed by the presence of an intensely

holy God at His coming. These “parts” will be lost. It is one of the promises of God! Count on it being true.

This loss is also a losing of our salvation. Why is this? It is because Jesus purchased for us a complete transformation or “salvation” but if, due to our negligence and rebellion, we do not obtain it we have lost it. It will never again be available to us. This is how even a truly born-again believer can lose part of his salvation.

THE LAND OF PROMISE

To further illustrate this point, let us go back again to the children of Israel and the land of promise, Canaan. God gave them this land freely and without cost. He defined the boundaries beforehand, showing them the length, breadth, and width of the land which they could inherit (Num 34:3-12).

Yet, there was one condition. These people had to day-by-day, step-by-step, according to the leading of the Holy Spirit, enter into this land and take possession of it. They could not simply sit on the far side of the Jordan river and proclaim that they owned it. They could not just stay on the east side worshipping and thanking God for this great gift He had given them. In order to actually get it, they, through faith and obedience, had to go in and possess it.

The same is true for us today in relation to our souls. Jesus explains, “By your endurance you shall be acquiring {or taking possession of} your souls” (Lk 21:19 *Concordant Literal Translation*). It is essential for every child of God to know and understand this truth.

Truly, Jesus Christ has purchased for every believer a complete salvation. His death on the cross was sufficient to change us from one degree of glory to another, into His exact image. He has defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil. All His work has been done. On the cross He stated: “It is finished” (Jn 19:30).

Yet there remains a part for us to do. We must, through faith and obedience, enter into and possess that which He has freely given. It will do us no good simply to

praise and thank God for His gift, while making no spiritual progress. These are not promises for a future “some-day.” Today is the day of salvation (II Cor 6:2). Today is the day to become “partakers of the divine nature” by laying hold of these “exceeding great and precious promises” (II Pet 1:4). We have before us a good land; let us go in and possess it!

If, on the other hand, we are unwilling to face the enemy, fight the battles, confront the giants in our lives, and manifest His victory, we will not gain what is rightfully ours. Even though God had already “given” Israel their territory, they never did fully enter in and possess it. They failed to obey God and through fear and disobedience failed to enter completely into the promise. That which they gained, they had, but that which they did not conquer was lost to them. It is the same way with us today.

There is one thing of which all Christians should be aware: There is no second chance to gain our soul. There will be no magic transformation of the soul later on. If we do not gain Christ today and fill our soul to overflowing with Him, it will be too late when He returns.

What we have gained will be ours, but what we have not gained will be lost to us unless we repent and press on into it today. We read: “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it” (Heb 4:1).

But surely some will ask, “What about being changed in a twinkling of an eye?” referring to I Corinthians 15:52. “Doesn’t this refer to instant transformation?” This is a wonderful verse, but it is not referring to our soul. If you read the context, you will realize that it is speaking about our bodies. Truly, our bodies will be changed instantly to be like Jesus. They will be glorified immediately when Jesus comes.

But concerning the soul, the scriptures are also clear, “*Now* is the day of salvation” (II Cor 6:2). The transformation of the soul must take place now, in this life. There will not be any “instant” work in our soul when He comes back. This should make perfect sense to a thinking person.

Why should Paul, for example, “die daily,” deny himself, “press forward,” “discipline his body,” and all these other things if all he really needed to do was wait for the magic day when he would be instantly changed to be like Jesus?

Much of the confusion which today’s believers experience is a result of misunderstanding the plan of God and His salvation. Many have failed to comprehend His purposes and how He is working them out in us today.

This lack of light produces much confusion and even error which only serves to hinder many who might wish to press on into more of God for themselves. One of the main purposes of this book is to bring light into this area which will help clarify these things.

As far as I can tell, almost all Christians believe in some degree of transformation. That is, they believe that they can be changed to some extent or other by the work of the Holy Spirit. Many admit the necessity to be delivered from some outward, more “gross” sins. Some even speak of a further holiness.

However, many believers in today’s Church also seem to think that this process is optional or not really that important. Many believe that no matter what the state of our inner being or soul is when the Lord returns, all problems will be resolved and all sinful tendencies and habits changed “in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor 15:52) as we mentioned previously.

Although few will admit it, this kind of thinking tends to lead to an attitude something like this: “Well, it doesn’t really matter if I am not completely holy. It doesn’t really matter if I am still “a little” envious, lustful, untruthful, angry, greedy, gossipy, jealous, or any of these other things.

“When Jesus comes, all this will be changed instantly, so why bother worrying about my condition now? After all, everyone else seems to be full of sin too. God forgives me. Why should I try to be holy now when I will get it all without effort later?” Although some teach that there is still a question of “rewards,” this factor does not seem to motivate many in our present society. I have even heard

Christians teach that they have a “deeper revelation” than Paul and that he didn’t need to suffer at all.

This sort of nonsense will stop abruptly when Jesus appears in power and glory. Those who are spouting such foolishness will begin to pray to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the intense, burning presence of God Almighty (Rev 6:16). “Knowing, therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (II Cor 5:11).

With this in mind, let us now investigate further what the word of God says about this subject. We know without a doubt that when Jesus returns we will all appear before His judgment seat (II Cor 5:10) and there we will give account concerning what we have done. On that “Day” our works will be “revealed by fire.” If our works pass the test, we will “receive a reward,” but if our works are defective, they will be burned up (I Cor 3: 12-15).

YET SO AS THROUGH THE FIRE

But let us look more closely at verse 15. We read that the person whose works were lost was indeed saved, “...yet so as through the fire.” So we see that not only do our works pass through the fire, but *we also* will be tested by the flame! We will go through the fire too!

What fire is this? It is nothing less than the presence of God! We read: “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). The burning intensity of what He is will analyze and reveal the contents of what we are.

This is the true test. If what we are inwardly is pure – that is, full of the life, nature, and essence of God – it will pass. Nothing could destroy this. If instead we are full of the old life and nature, it will be consumed by His fiery presence. It will be lost.

Remember that He is not just a fire, but a consuming fire. Without a doubt what will be consumed before His throne is anything which is not holy and righteous and pure – anything which does not correspond to what He Himself is. In fact, if you stop to think about it this must be so. Obviously nothing which is unholy could endure in very presence of God.

God must eliminate all sin from His people. When God created the world of Adam and Eve, they were without sin. However, one sin, just one, destroyed forever the whole creation which He had made. In the same way, if the sinful life and nature were to be allowed to enter into the new creation of God, sooner or later it will produce sin (See Chapter 4). And this one sin would pollute and destroy forever this new creation. Therefore, no one with any kind of sin in their nature will be allowed in.

Consequently, when He comes, if we are still full of our own sinful life, something must be done. What will be done is that the fiery presence of God will devour all that is not like Himself. The old soul life with its fallen nature will be burned. It will be truly "lost" as Jesus taught us. This will be the end of all that is old, "natural," and untransformed in us.

Illustrating this point, the Scriptures ask "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings" (Is 33:14,15)? The answer is given: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil." This indicates righteous people: those who are filled with God and allowing Him to live His life through them.

In the book of Revelation we are presented with an amazing spectacle. We see a group of men and women standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire (Rev 15:2). They are standing in the middle of a fiery inferno. But what location is this? In fact, it is the transparent pavement directly in front of the throne of God (see Ex 24:10, Ezek 28:14).

They are in the very presence of God. And in this awesome Presence it is as though everything is burning with fire. Yet these special people are comfortable there. They are unaffected by the flame. In fact, they are worshipping, singing the song of Moses in the presence of God Almighty.

Remember also the three young friends of Daniel the prophet who were thrown into the fiery furnace. These

were holy people. They had given their lives completely to God. Therefore, by the grace of God, they were unaffected by the flame. These things still speak to us today.

THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

John the Baptist declared: "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor" (Lk 3:16,17).

Here we find a strange pronouncement. John says that God's Son, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, is coming and when He comes, He is going to baptize men and women with fire. What is the meaning of this fire? Why is it that God would want to pour out fire from heaven upon those who believe in Him?

God desires to purify His sons. He not only wants to gather from among men those who will believe, but He also desires to purge and purify them so that when they appear before Him, they will be holy as He is.

I believe that this baptismal fire is the same as the refiner's fire mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures (See Mal 3:2,3; Zech 13:9) which is an intensely hot, glowing bed of coals. It is this kind of fire that a gold or silversmith would use to purge all the impurities from the metals with which he is working. In this same way God is baptizing us with His fire to cleanse us, to purify us, and to make us ready for His appearing.

Jesus said: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Lk 12:49 NIV)! There is no doubt that God wants to purify His children. He not only wants to save them from what they have done but also save them from what they are. He wants to purify them inwardly so that they will be of the same nature and substance as He.

Ephesians says: "...that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such

thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." Such a thing requires the baptism of fire. Not only must we be baptized with the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's life and power, but we also must be baptized with fire – that purifying, refining, inward burning which melts us, changes us, burns away the dross, and causes us to be like Him.

You see, every believer will experience the fire of God, today and in the future. If we spend time in His presence, this will occur now because truly He is "a consuming fire." However, if we avoid intimate contact with Him, then this essential experience will be reserved for the future when there is no possibility of gain.

The fire of God is something through which we can pass today if we are willing and ready. This will prepare us for the fire of His presence in the future. If we allow Him to do His purifying work within us now, then at His appearing we will have nothing to fear. If we allow Him to thoroughly search and purify our soul, then we will have become transformed like the petrified wood in chapter 6 and therefore immune to any further burning.

Does this mean that a believer will "go to hell?" No, we are not saying any such thing. Neither does the Bible. Here we read nothing about losing eternal ZOE life. At the judgment seat of Christ no one is "thrown into the lake of fire" but the antichrist and the false prophet. The question here is not one of "heaven or hell." What we are seeing here is that there is some serious "loss" for unprepared Christians. It is the loss of the soul or PSUCHÊ life. This is the irrevocable destruction of all the natural life with the sinful nature. What will remain is that which has become eternal by being saturated by His eternal life.

So then a reasonable question might be: "What is the end result of such a judgment? How does this ultimately affect a believer?" It is clear that with every believer who stands before the judgment seat of Christ, at least something will be saved (I Cor 3:15) regardless of the loss. At the minimum, it will be the human spirit which has been reborn and joined with the Spirit of God.

For example, Paul speaks of someone who was to be delivered "...to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that *his spirit may be saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor 5:5). Also, most believers will have attained at least some degree of spiritual growth. That is, some amount of supernatural transformation will have taken place, some quantity of eternal substance will have been deposited. This also will not and indeed cannot be burned.

Any and every part of the soul which has been transformed will endure. Whatever has been saturated and permeated with God's life is by definition eternal. What we have gained surely is gained forever, but the old life and nature which remain will be lost.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

But how will this affect us? How can we understand these things? In various places in the scriptures, we read about levels or stages of spiritual growth. (See: Eph 4:15, I Pet 2:2, II Pet 3:18 and I Jn 2:12-14.) We read of "babes in Christ," spiritual "young men," and even "fathers," thus indicating "levels" of maturity. I believe that these things are not just figures of speech but refer to spiritual realities.

Therefore, it is logical to suppose that the degree of spiritual maturity which we attain in this life by faithful obedience to the Holy Spirit will be our eternal state when Jesus comes.

In other words, if we remain "babes" in Christ, we will be forever babies. If we press on a little to gain some maturity, this too will be our eternal state. All the rest will be lost and burned up by His presence. If, on the other hand, we press on to know the Lord and reach some degree of adulthood spiritually, we will forever be thankful and suffer little, if any, loss at His coming.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is our reward. We will not receive silver or gold or other material rewards in eternity. God Himself is our reward. He said to Abraham, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Gen 15:1). Do you understand this? In His presence, nothing

else has any value. He is the One whom we will supremely enjoy.

The psalmist clearly says: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps 16:11). Believe it; it is true! He is and will be our reward. But think about this also. Everyone's ability to enjoy this glorious experience and therefore their reward will be governed by their maturity.

This is just exactly as it is in this present life. Our physical maturity is the governing factor in our ability to enjoy many of the things of this life.

I remember going to a sports event with my children and another large family. Everyone had fun but not everyone had the same experience. The little children enjoyed crawling around under the seats finding interesting stuff. The somewhat older children had fun playing around with each other. The older children and the adults actually enjoyed watching the sporting event.

You see, in eternity everyone will enjoy God, but each one's "reward" will be based upon their spiritual maturity, which will govern their capacity to enjoy God Himself and His new creation.

Did you know that all believers will be with the Lord forever, but not everyone will be the same? The spiritual maturity of which we are speaking will manifest itself in splendid, radiant glory. Daniel 12:3 reads: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever."

Furthermore, each one will have a certain "quantity" of this glory. Each one will shine with his or her own degree of brightness, depending upon their degree of transformation. Remembering that the original texts were not separated into verses with numbers, let us read from I Corinthians 15: 41,42. "...for [as] one star differs from another star in [the degree of] glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead." What is gained of Christ today will be revealed when He comes. For all eternity, each one will exhibit a different degree of glory according to their maturity.

It may be that these thoughts are new to you and that you find them somewhat startling. Therefore, I would like to urge you not to simply react to this emotionally. Search the scriptures for yourself.

Pray about these things. Review these thoughts after some time has passed. I believe that God will give you grace to see that there is more to “salvation” than we have thought in the past. There is more to the Divine revelation in God’s word than has been preached. Truly, we need to press on to know the Lord and give our attention to spiritual things lest at any time we drift away from them (Heb 2:1).

WHAT ABOUT PERFECTION?

Undoubtedly some will ask, “What about perfection? Is it possible then for a Christian to become perfect? Could it be that when Jesus comes, some will suffer no loss whatsoever?” To answer these questions we must look closely at what the scriptures have to say. We cannot look around us and judge this issue from the condition of others. Neither can we look at ourselves to decide what is right. Our answer must come from the Scriptures which we know to be true.

Let us read from I Thessalonians 5:23,24. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you *completely*; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” Paul here is uttering a kind of intercession – a prayer for these Christians whom he loves. And praying in this way, he shows that he has faith that as they are faithful to God, God also will be faithful to perform this glorious work within them.

Let us think about it in this way. If the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus were not powerful enough to completely transform us, then we need to ask Him to come back and complete the job. If all that He accomplished on the cross was only good enough to change us partially, then we must immediately begin a world-wide prayer

campaign and ask Him to please come back and do what is necessary to finish the work.

To deny the power of God to change any and every human being completely is to deny that His work was sufficient. This is not the case. Indeed, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30)! On His side, Jesus has done everything necessary for our transformation and sanctification. On our side, we only need to continue to seek His face until the coming day. We can be confident that "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Heb 7:27).

This, in fact, was Paul the apostle's goal. He says: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Phil 3:12). You see, Paul had seen something. He had seen the glorious, risen Lord and he was focused with every fiber of his being on "laying hold" of the perfection he had seen. Not only was he pursuing this but he was also consumed with helping and urging others to arrive at the same place, too.

In Colossians 1:28,29 we read: "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may *present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*. To this end I also labor, striving according to the working which works in me mightily."

Jesus Himself exhorts us: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mt 5:48 KJV). This is the standard: the perfection of God Himself. While we have seen that the efforts of the flesh will never and, in fact, can never meet this lofty goal, we have also been seeing that it is indeed possible. It is accomplished simply by receiving and living by another Life.

We must be careful not to take our example from those around us but from God Himself. Paul plainly rebukes this type of error saying: "But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (II Cor 10:12). If we aim at nothing, we are sure to hit it.

It is unfortunately true that we see very few Christians who are living a life free from sin and exhibiting the super-

natural Life. Sadly, most believers are not entering in and possessing all that God has for them. Perhaps one reason for this is that they do not know that there is this possibility of being made perfect. Beyond the new birth, they have no notion that there is anything more to be gained or lost.

Truly God has said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). There is most certainly a great darkness covering the Church of our day. While many think that they are perhaps the most spiritually enlightened generation, even this most essential truth about the salvation of the soul is almost completely lacking and/or misunderstood. Many who imagine themselves enlightened are really walking in darkness.

Let us be very clear here that I am not teaching "sinless perfection" – the idea that we might arrive at a place in this life where we could never sin. One factor that makes this impossible is that we still have a fallen body. This body is a "body of sin" (Rm 6:6) with natural, fleshly appetites. The desire for food, comfort, sex, and many other things will always be with us as long as we are in this body. This body will only be changed when Jesus comes.

This is why Paul teaches that we must exercise spiritual dominion over our body. He says: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (I Cor 9:27). Also, we read that he longed to be free from this sinful body and receive another heavenly, pure body (II Cor 5:2,4). This is because the more he became purified inwardly and filled with God's life, the more he realized that this earthly body is not a worthy container for this precious substance. The sinful body became an increasingly weary burden.

Dear brothers and sisters, the salvation of the soul is, indeed, a serious subject. The consequences of what we have been discussing here are eternal. There is no time to waste! There will be no second chance. Therefore, we need to be encouraging one another more and more as we see the day approaching (Heb 10:25). By the grace and mercy of God, may we not be among "...those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the [complete] saving of the soul" (Heb 10:39).

8.

MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS

We have been seeing in the preceding chapter that the salvation of the soul is not an event but a process. It is a lifelong transformation which every child of God needs to be experiencing. All of us need to grow up spiritually into what God intends for us to be. But how is this happening? How can we understand the different things which are taking place in our lives, both within us and around us?

Of course, this spiritual growth is a living process. It is a product of the supernatural Life maturing within us. It is Christ “being formed” in our inner being (Gal 4:19). Thus, it is a mystery. Just as we do not really understand “...how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child” (Eccl 11:5), so too, spiritual growth is a mystery.

There is just no way to explain in a detailed, systematic way how it takes place. It is not a product of following some pre-projected set of rules or procedures. Instead, it is the operation of the Spirit of God within us.

Even though all this is true, there are a few factors which we can recognize. Perhaps we could think of them as guideposts to look for, so to speak, which may help us to at least partially identify some of the things which our Lord is accomplishing within us. God, through the Scriptures, has set before us some of the things which He wishes to accomplish in our interior.

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the people of his day for the coming of the Messiah. He was prophesying about the One who was to come. As part of this ministry, quoting the prophet Isaiah, he declared that he was: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Lk 3:4-6).

This is a wonderful, prophetic word about the salvation of the soul. Here John is touching on some very important changes which God wishes to make inside each one of us. In our soul, when it is as yet untouched by God, we have many different strengths and weaknesses. We have "areas" of our life where we feel strong and capable and others in which we do not have a lot of confidence. Also, we have emotional or psychological "regions" which are twisted or maimed by our various experiences in life.

In order for Jesus to manifest Himself through us, all of these things must be changed. He must transform our interior being in such a way that He can easily and freely flow out through us and reveal Himself to the world. In our interior, we must become a "highway" for the King – a way for Him to express Himself without hindrance or a confusing mixture of self and His reality.

For example, everyone has their own "mountains." Regardless of how weak or helpless we may feel, every one of us has our own areas of strength. I remember, some years ago my wife and I were counseling with a young woman who seemed to have no backbone whatsoever. She was completely passive and did nothing. Apparently, she could do nothing for herself and acted very much like a human vegetable.

We came to learn that as a young person, her parents had done everything for her. She had never made a decision for herself. She had been "carried" through life by others. So, when she left home to go to college, she simply fell apart mentally. Without help, she could just not survive.

But through trying to help her, we discovered something very interesting. In spite of this apparent weakness, she did have one great strength. She was very, very stubborn. When she did not want to do something, nothing could move her. Whenever we tried to encourage her in some direction, her tremendous stubbornness became evident. This was a great mountain in her life.

All human beings have these "mountains" or high places. Everyone has some areas of strength. They may be very capable, very intelligent, very apt at dealing with and controlling other people. They may be very good at organizing things, they may have talent at music or oratory. They simply may be very strong-willed and be able to meet almost any requirement. Some people are especially talented and have quite a few of such abilities. Others are perhaps less "endowed." But every soul which God created has at least some such mountains or strong points in his or her life.

As we have been seeing, this Jesus who lives within us wants to also live through us. He desires to express Himself through our being. However, these areas in which we are so strong and capable present a problem. In these "parts" of our personality, He has a very difficult time expressing Himself because there is already another life actively using these faculties.

Since we are already so capable in these areas, why would we need to submit ourselves to His direction and control? Without much effort at all, we are able to speak and act in these areas of life. I am not saying that we are purposely rebelling or trying to do something against God's will. In fact, quite often when we are acting in our areas of strength, we believe ourselves to be doing the will of God. We are trying to "live for Him."

In Philippians chapter 3, Paul makes quite a list of who and what he was before he met Jesus Christ. Evidently, he was a very capable, well-bred, educated Jewish male. Yet, after describing all these strengths and advantages, he says that: "...what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Philip 3:7,). In the

kingdom of God, these things were not of value to him. On the contrary, they were a hindrance – a loss – because they were parts of his character through which God could not move and express Himself freely.

It is these “mountains,” these strong parts of our soul, which need to be broken down. These high places need to be brought low and leveled out. As long as we are capable of living and doing ourselves, we have no need to depend completely on Jesus. It may be that we intend to let Him express Himself. It may be that we want to be obedient. It is just that our own life is so strong in these areas that we often don’t even realize when it is ourselves and not Him who is being expressed.

Therefore, God must do a breaking work in every one of His children. He must work to break down our confidence in ourselves, our ambition to work for Him, our trusting in our own abilities, and our relying on our own strength so we can no longer do and be for God but can only act or speak when He is motivating us. Only in this way can we become a “highway” for the King.

Those who are very proud, God must humble. He will work continuously in their lives to expose their true weaknesses in various ways. He may allow them to fall (Dan 11:35). He may cause their cherished works for Him to disintegrate.

He may even have to expose their sins to others to abase them. He will deal blow after blow to their pride until it is ground down to dust. Only afterward will they become useful vessels for His service. Truly, “God resists the proud” (Jas 4:6).

Those who are very capable God may allow to fail. Time and time again, He will arrange circumstances so that they cannot accomplish their objectives. Time after time He will frustrate them. This is especially true in their work for Him. They try one thing, but it does not work. They turn to labor at another, only to have it fall apart in their hands.

Often, such believers become discouraged and bitter. They think that God has abandoned them. After all, they think, they have been trying to serve God with all their

hearts. Where is the blessing? Where is God's love? Where is the mighty hand of God? The mighty hand of God is indeed being manifested right before their eyes, but they can't see it. It is working to break down their own strength and capabilities. It is working to destroy their own confidence in themselves. Actually, this is the most loving thing that God could do for them.

God's word says: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time" (I Pet 5:6). And when will this "due time" be? When can God finally use us in any kind of larger way? It will be when we no longer "...trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (II Cor 1:9). It will be when our own strength, our own abilities and capabilities and our own confidence is no longer. It will be when the mountains of our strong personality have become plains. It will be when we have died to ourselves, our ambitions and our plans. It will be when Jesus alone is being manifested through us.

One time while ministering to the multitudes, Jesus asked His disciples to give them something to eat. Obviously, He already knew that they had very little, only five loaves and two fishes. But He was trying to illustrate a truth for them. He knew, too, that as natural men, they had little to offer the people.

So He took what they had in His hands. There, He blessed it and then broke it into pieces. Afterwards, it was enough to feed many. So, too, it is in our own lives. What we have as natural human beings may look good from our own point of view. But until we are broken by His hands, we can be of little use.

In the beginning of our Christian walk, we may appear to succeed, only to later encounter many frustrations. When Paul was first converted, he immediately was in the synagogues debating with the Jewish leaders and causing quite a stir. He "confounded the Jews... proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). Later, he "disputed against the Hellenists" until they attempted to kill him (Acts 9:29).

Yet, soon after, he sort of disappears from the "Christian scene." But where was he? He was in Tarsus,

Damascus, and Arabia (Gal 1:17). We do not know exactly why he went to these places or how long he was there, but one thing is clear. When he appears again in the biblical record, he is no longer debating and disputing, but ministering Christ. Instead of working *for* God, He has learned to let God work through him. Shortly after, his name changes from "Saul" the natural, zealous, religious man to Paul, the "little one," the one being used by God.

How many of God's children have developed large followings and grand ministries only to fall into some kind of sin later on and do damage to the reputation of Christ? How many have done "mighty works for God" only to disgrace Him later?

This is because they were never broken. The "mountains" of their personal strength were never leveled. And so they continued on, using their own ambition, energy, and efforts to work for Jesus until their human strength failed. Thus, they became easy prey for the devil.

Truly, it is the loving hand of our heavenly Father not to let us succeed on our own. It is a demonstration of His great love for us that He keeps us from what we want and disciplines us severely. Only in this way can we eventually become a vessel of honor to His holy name.

THE VALLEYS

Not only do we all have areas of natural strength and capability, but we also have areas of weakness and depression. These are the valleys of our lives. These are the situations where we have no self-confidence. We have no great abilities and assurance. Perhaps we are full of fear and so we avoid at all costs situations which will put us in a position to have to do or say anything that makes us uncomfortable. Perhaps we are afraid of being rejected, so we do not speak to others about Christ. Possibly, we feel inadequate, so we do nothing to reach out and help others.

Our shyness leads us not to rebuke or exhort others who need this ministry. Our lack of confidence leads us to stay at home and "let others do the work." There are even

some who glorify their timidity in their own minds, classifying it as “humility” instead of what it really is – fear.

Dear friends, this kind of activity also does not glorify Jesus. When we are full of fear, and therefore resistant to doing, saying, or being any number things, this severely limits our Lord expressing Himself through us. He cannot move freely through the “highway” of our being because He is encountering the resistance of our human weaknesses.

When He wishes to speak through us, we balk. When He desires to act, we resist. The valleys of our insecurities and timidity create obstacles in His way. The many-faceted fullness of His personality cannot be expressed. Therefore, in order to be transformed, we must have these valleys filled in. We must experience the salvation of God in these areas of our life.

A large part of our transformation in these areas requires faith. To act and speak when we feel inadequate necessitates faith in God. We must trust that when He is leading us to do or say something, He will sustain us through whatever the results may be. We must learn to hear His voice and then obey Him through faith, facing whatever fears and weakness we may have within us.

No doubt, our Lord will lead us into these areas again and again. We will have to “walk on the water” over and over. We will be required to face our fears many, many times. We must step out in faith repeatedly until, strangely, these things are no longer so difficult. Over time we will find that what was once unthinkable is now a normal part of our life.

When we obey Jesus to say or do His will in areas which make us uncomfortable, little by little these valleys are filled in. Where once there was nothing but weakness, now there is strength. The valley has become a plain. However, it is not “we” who are being expressed. It is as John the Baptist said: “One mightier than I” (Lk 3:16).

In practice, it is these very areas of fear and weakness that the Lord can use to glorify Himself in the most powerful ways. Since in these parts of our lives we have very

little expression of self, God can very easily fill and use them. When we are willing to face into our fears in obedience to the Spirit, Jesus can manifest His nature powerfully. Jesus says that His "...strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor 12:9).

It is when we do not know what to do or what to say, that He can fill us with His thoughts and desires. It is when we are completely incapable that His glorious virtue can be displayed. God does not require strong, confident, talented people. Instead, He is looking for those who will, through faith, allow Him to be all He wants to be through them. Truly Paul said: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor 12:10). God used Paul's inabilities to manifest His power.

Another factor in this transformation experience is that we must deny ourselves. Denying ourselves involves not only not doing what we want when we know Jesus is displeased, but also doing what we don't want when we see it is His will.

How many times the flesh resists entering into areas of weakness, timidity, or depression. How often we want to be carried along by good feelings and confidence instead of simple obedience in faith. Frequently, we are waiting for God to change "the way we feel" before acting or speaking while He is waiting for us to obey so that He can change the way we are. "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him" (Heb 11:6).

I will never forget meeting a middle-aged Christian sister in England. She had undergone a divorce or some other traumatic experience. As a result, she had become depressed and spent her days moping around. She was always attending meetings looking for some stimulation and encouragement. She was forever a burden on others with her discouraged, sad demeanor. Her hope was that something would happen to her that was so good, so completely wonderful, that it would counterbalance all her negative feelings and cause her to start feeling good again.

Of course, this never happened and never will happen. The real solution for her was to deny herself. She

needed to deny herself the luxury of self-pity. In fact, she needed to stop thinking about herself altogether. She needed to open up to God and start thinking about serving others. Her need was to make the happiness and well-being of others her goal. In this way, she would find from the Lord a supernatural satisfaction and happiness which would fill her depression.

THE CROOKED PLACES

There are people who are naturally strong. Others suffer from timidity and weakness. But there are also those whose lives have been twisted by the enemy. Some time in their lives, most likely in childhood, they experienced something devastating which left an emotional scar upon their character.

For some, this may have been sexual abuse or rape. For others, it could have been physical mistreatment. Still others were psychologically traumatized by continuous verbal abuse and/or neglect. The divorce of their parents often wreaks this kind of havoc in the personality of children.

These things and many others leave the persons who have experienced them with a kind of "crooked" viewpoint on life. They have deep emotional scars. When the normal course of life brings them into contact with these inner damaged areas of feelings, they run away or exhibit other peculiar reactions. They avoid any situations which might remind them of their experiences or "put them through it" again. Often, their husbands, wives, or others around them cannot understand why they react to life in the way they do. These are damaged twisted areas though which God cannot move.

Such individuals usually do not want God or anyone else messing around with these interior parts. Often there is great emotional pain associated with whatever caused this psychological distortion. Therefore, they avoid any personal transactions which might touch upon these areas of pain. Their lives manifest a kind of twisted, strange

behavior. Instead of reacting normally to everyday situations, often they see in them hidden danger. So, at least inwardly, they shut themselves off, turning inward to hide behind some flimsy emotional barrier they have erected in their minds which they think will protect them from further pain.

However, this does not work. Seeing these peculiar reactions, those around them are often stimulated to do or say the very things which serve to irritate the wound. In trying to pry them loose from these strange mannerisms being exhibited, they further injure them.

God's solution to these deep hurts is to bring them into the light. We must open up our lives to Jesus and "let Him see" what has happened to us. We must let Him touch and heal our innermost wounds. Once again faith is required. We must know and trust that God loves us completely and without reserve. We must believe that He will treat us with the most tender kindness. We must have faith that He who made us knows how to heal our wounds and will do so with the minimum of suffering.

Unless we are able to open these areas of our lives completely to Him, we can never experience His healing. It is absolutely imperative for us to open up every inward "door" to Him and allow Him to see everything. Everything which happened, everything which was said to us, all our pain and tears must be laid at His feet. In this way, the Great Physician will come, lay His hand upon you, and heal you.

In some cases, emotionally wounded individuals have buried their hurt so deeply that even their own mind has "forgotten" what has happened. They repress their feelings so severely – becoming an emotional cripple in the process – that they blot out completely what has taken place. This can be especially true in cases of rape or sexual abuse of young children.

But as we grow spiritually – as we are more and more intimate with Jesus – He can and will bring these things to mind. He will shine His light upon them. I do not mean that we should try to think up things or imagine something

happened when it really did not. I only know that in His time and in His way, He can reveal “forgotten,” buried memories which are hindering our spiritual progress. Then, in His light, He can heal this area so that His life can flow through us in new ways.

One secret to emotional healing is forgiveness. Jesus can give us genuine, deep forgiveness for those who damaged us. This is an extremely important factor in His healing process. When we are able to forgive others, we will experience a marvelous liberation.

In His light we can see how these people were just pawns of God’s enemy. We can understand how perhaps they too suffered similar things and that they, living and acting in darkness, were simply tools of the devil. The forgiveness of Christ can flood our soul and liberate both us and those who mistreated us from the bondage of our own feelings. This supernatural forgiveness opens the way for divine healing in our souls.

After bringing everything into God’s light and then forgiving others, there is still another step. These wounded, twisted individuals must open up these areas of their lives for Jesus to fill. They, like those with valleys of weakness and fear, must in faith be willing to step out into these territories which once were only pain.

They must, trusting in the protection of Jesus, step out in obedience to experience Him in what perhaps was once only emotional “ground-up meat.” They must discard the flimsy psychological protective barriers they have erected, stop running from intimate, emotional interactions, and begin to let His life fill these areas. They must be willing to let Him act and react, love and be loved through them.

Only by risking all and stepping out in faith into these wounded emotional areas can anyone be freed and healed completely. Avoiding such opening of the soul will only serve to cause further pain to yourself and others.

Through forgiveness and the healing touch of Jesus, these damaged areas of our lives then become open for the Life of God to live and move through us. Perhaps this will take some time, even years, of opening more and more to

our Healer. There is no rule here. Every life is different and Jesus knows what is best. But without a doubt, with time and through faith, we can experience the new Life filling even these damaged areas. They too can be used by our God to manifest Himself. The crooked ways can be made straight so that He can move through us.

Further, it is often through these very areas that were attacked and injured by the devil using other people that we can have the most powerful impact. These parts of our lives, after they are healed and filled with God, become powerful weapons against the evil one who had tried to destroy us. Surely, "the lame shall take the prey" (Is 33:23).

THE ROUGH WAYS

When people come to Christ, they come – in the words of a famous hymn – "just as they are." Sometimes, however, "as they are" is a little peculiar. Now I know that we are "a peculiar people" (I Pet 2:9) but some Christians are just a little more peculiar than necessary. They have personality traits and quirks which can be amusing or even abrasive and downright irritating. They have habits which can get on others' nerves or behaviors which only serve to alienate both unbeliever and believer alike. They are a little "rough around the edges."

Obviously, such behavior hinders the full and free expression of Christ in their lives. Our strange behavior or unusual habits do not serve to glorify God. They, too, need changing.

Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to enlighten us. When we are open to Him, He will show us if we have some of these peculiar traits which do not bring honor to Him. As part of this illumination, He may even use others who know and love us best to bring some correction. Then we have the wonderful opportunity to deny ourselves. We can experience the cross of Christ putting to death what we are, and having it replaced with what He is.

Naturally, if we love ourselves and appreciate our special little characteristics, we will never experience the

glorious liberty of the sons of God. Only when we see ourselves in His light, revealing the foolishness of what we are, can we be changed. Then as we repent for exhibiting our own fleshly nature and open to Him for His new life, we can be freed from what we are. As we let Him do all of His work in us, we can become a highway for the King.

HOW THE ENEMY WORKS

While we commonly think that our behavior is “innocent” and our problems are only normal, in truth there is more to it than meets the eye. Any untransformed area of our lives can be and is used by evil spirits and demons to influence us, control us, and cause us to do their will.

This is especially true of those mental and emotional territories where they have succeeded in causing some damage, thus establishing a kind of beachhead within us. These evil spirits use others over whom they have control to impact our lives. Then, having caused damage, they use this wounded area to exert influence over us. Using these other people, they instill in their victims certain patterns of thought. They cause them to view others and the world around them in a certain light.

For example: Let us suppose that these demons influence some family member to sexually abuse a young girl. Before this event or these series of events, she perhaps was a carefree, open, normal girl. But afterwards, her view of life changes. Now she is no longer innocent. She no longer feels free to act “girlish” for fear that she might attract the attention of some male who would hurt her again.

Perhaps she blames herself for acting in a way that attracted this male attention. She withdraws emotionally, building emotional and mental walls to try to protect herself from such a thing happening again.

Thus, the evil spirits have succeeded in establishing in her a beachhead, an emotional “ground” where they can control her. Whenever she is approached by men, she will always have a strange reaction to them. Her reaction will not be a normal response to what they are saying or doing,

but the reaction of a wounded soul. This woman then will have a lot of trouble in her future relationships with men, principally her husband. She will have great difficulty being a normal woman. Any advance her husband may make will probably be interpreted in the light of her past. The evil spirits have succeeded in establishing within her a mind set – a series of thoughts. These thoughts, when triggered by something her husband does, then produce a reaction of withdrawal and emotional closing up.

Perhaps her husband, not understanding this peculiar reaction, might become angry. His anger will further serve to wound her and worsen their relationship. Some men, not fearing God or understanding the true problem, become frustrated, being unsatisfied with their relationship with their wife and so, being further stimulated by demons, go on to try and satisfy their frustration by abusing their own daughters. In this way, the ground the enemy has is passed on from generation to generation.

Let us then take the case of a young man who was often beaten severely by his father. This abuse continued for many years. So then, in this young man's mind, he has formed an opinion of men. They cannot be trusted. He becomes full of fear, even paranoia. In the future, he will have a lot of difficulty relating to other men. He cannot confide in them. He cannot make friends or open his heart. His mind has been programmed to think in certain ways and his reactions are predictable.

The evil spirits have gained a certain amount of territory in him and they then use this territory to control him. Perhaps when this man receives Christ, he wants to serve Him. But he has great problems relating to other men in the body of Christ. He is always suspicious, wounded, and closed. No doubt, the devil will arrange circumstances to continually try to reinforce these ideas. The result is isolation and division.

THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

So we see that the evil spirits work to establish thought patterns within our souls. Using many and vari-

ous techniques they implant certain ideas or a series of ideas in our minds which we accept as true. These thought chains relate to life and relationships with others. They become “truths” for us and so we act and react to our environment according to these thought patterns.

Normally, associated with these thoughts are certain “buttons” which the evil spirits use to activate these thoughts. They have established in our minds certain triggers which get our minds going along these pre-programmed lines. These buttons are usually something which others say or do which is similar to the things which the enemy originally used in our lives to establish these thought patterns.

Therefore, we react not to the truth of the situation, but to the devil’s version of the truth which he has succeeded in implanting in us. Often the people around us who are used to trigger these thoughts are surprised by our reactions. This is because we are not responding to what is actually being said or done but to an already programmed series of thoughts which has been triggered.

Obviously, such people are not open channels for the service of God. It is very common to see believers who, although they are used by the Lord, also have areas of their lives which are under the control of evil spirits. The result is that the Lord’s expression through them is limited and often polluted by their actions and reactions which are under the influence of the enemy.

I am not saying that these people are “possessed” by demons. It is just that their thought patterns, established by the enemy through their prior experiences, open them to being used by him. They are suspicious, fearful, sometimes aggressive, shut up, wounded souls.

When other people try to get close to them and begin to touch on these wounded areas, two things may happen. Some react by closing up and emotionally running away. Others lash out like a cornered animal to wound the one who is trying to be close so that he will back off.

This is the classic “flight or fight” instinct. These are natural, human protective mechanisms, but they do not

manifest the divine nature. In order to become a “highway” for the King, these things must be changed.

In Romans 12:2 we read that we are not to be conformed to this world but be “transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Here is God’s solution of the “programming” of the evil spirits. It is to shine His light into us and expose these lies of the enemy.

As we walk with Him, He will use various methods, including circumstances and the counsel of others, to reveal these areas of the evil spirit’s control. He will unveil their lies, showing them for what they are. He will help us understand how these lies became implanted in us. Then He will show us His truth which will set us free from the bondage under which we have been living.

This “renewing” of our thought processes will bring our mind more and more under the control of the Holy Spirit. The more our thoughts are under His control, the more we can be an exhibition of who He is. Truly, this is what every Christian needs to experience.

Jesus came to save our souls completely. His will is for us to become a living expression of Himself without hindrance or barrier. There is no bondage, wound, mountain, or valley which is too difficult for Him to change or cure. His power is more than great enough. His love is unbounded. His grace sufficient for even the most difficult cases. Truly, He is “...able to save to the uttermost, those who come to God through Him” (Heb 7:25).

We must never, never believe that our case is too difficult or that we must always remain as we are. Jesus’ work on the cross was sufficient to change anyone into His glorious image. No one is too weak. No situation is too hard. Genesis 18:14 asks: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Our answer must be “No!”

We must put our faith firmly on this fact if we are to be free. Jesus has conquered even death and sin. All things are now under His feet. His power is freely available to liberate anyone who trusts in Him.

However, none of this will happen without our willing cooperation. God will do nothing within us unless and

until we are completely ready and willing for Him to do it. In order to enter into this good land and possess it, we must day-by-day follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When He leads us into areas of weakness or fear, there we must go – day-by-day, further and further until we have overcome. When He chooses to allow us to fail and be frustrated, we must submit ourselves under His hand. We can always be confident that what God is doing in our lives is the best for us.

Our view cannot be limited to only tomorrow, but we must be able also to see as God does into the future. Today's challenges and sufferings are producing tomorrow's glory.

GIANTS IN THE LAND

Naturally, our journey into the good land will involve many battles. Just as the children of Israel had to battle many enemies to enter in and take possession of what God had already given them, so we, too, will be faced with many spiritual enemies. Chief among these foes were the giants.

So also, in their souls, new believers often have some very strong forces arrayed against them. The damaged areas of our souls, the weaknesses which we find within ourselves, can be very difficult to conquer.

Not only do we have our flesh to contend with, but we also have the entrenched power of the evil spirits. Not surprisingly, they will rise up to oppose any effort to take away their territory. For some, the challenge seems overwhelming. They are simply too afraid. They have little faith in God so they refuse to enter in and confront the giants in their lives.

They refuse to step out in faith in areas of emotional damage or weakness. They will not open their lives completely and allow God to touch them. They are then in the same situation as the ten spies who came back from Canaan with a bad report. "There are giants in the land," they cried! "We are too weak to overcome them!" So they did not enter in and instead wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until they died.

How many children of God today are in this same situation? They are refusing to obey Jesus because of fear. They are unwilling to step out in faith and trust and confront the giants in their lives. So they are wandering in the spiritual wilderness.

Perhaps they go from church to church, from ministry to Christian ministry, hoping for some kind of deliverance which does not involve any act of faith on their part. They want to be free, but they do not want to have to risk anything or obey. They are wandering in the wilderness of sin.

There is no lack today of “deliverance ministers” who are going around trying to cast out these evil spirits which have influence in believers’ lives. They invest a lot of time shouting and rebuking these spirit beings. The problem is that often these spirits are not really “in.”

Many individuals who have a pronounced influence of these demons in their lives are not really “possessed” by them but only under their control or influence as we have been seeing. Therefore, “casting them out” has only a temporary effect, if any. The ground which they have established in the minds of the affected persons remains, and therefore the influence of these spirits returns. Only genuine transformation will be of real help in these cases.

Certainly there are real cases of demon possession and these should be treated accordingly. But most often, what believers experience is this “programming” of the mind. This can only be overcome by the “reprogramming” of the Holy Spirit.

Our entrance into all that Jesus has purchased for us requires our faith and obedience. He has done His part. He has paid the price which was necessary. Now the way has been opened for any and all to come and be saved – not just born again but completely changed from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ. Are you ready and willing to submit and obey? If so, you will gain eternal rewards which will never fade away.

9.

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

*B*efore God founded the present world and all that is in it, He had within His heart a marvelous plan. At the very center of this design, He had in mind the formation of a bride with whom He could join in Holy intimacy – with whom He could enter into a marriage covenant.

However, in His great wisdom He knew that this work could only be accomplished with great difficulty. This heavenly woman of His desire could only arrive at the perfection which she must have to enter into this marriage union through great trial and tribulation. She must have known and then also rejected sin.

We understand this fact because the Lamb of God was “...slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). Thus, God knew and understood the necessity of the fall and redemption of man before He even began His marvelous works.

You see, God could have simply created a bride for Himself perfect and beautiful in every respect. But the results of such a creation were already evident. Our Lord had already made an extremely powerful and beautiful being – one that was flawless in every respect. It is the angel Lucifer of whom we speak here.

However, this perfect one had never known sin. So, in the course of time, he began thinking, dreaming, and imag-

ining how he could be as great as God. He made a decision to rebel against his Maker and so his kingdom became one of darkness and iniquity.

Our God must have an eternal companion whom He can fully trust. There must never come a time when she could be tempted with sin and so turn against Him. So, in His infinite wisdom, our Lord allowed the men and women who will become His bride to pass through the experience of sin. He gave them a free choice from the beginning and so allowed them to know the darkness and depravity of sin as well as the results of rebellion against Him.

So the bride of Christ is coming into her position of glory and eminence from the opposite direction than Lucifer. He was created perfect and then fell. They, being born into sin and then redeemed by their Maker, must daily choose to reject sin. Step by step, day after day, they understand more and more how disgusting sin is and how repugnant the results of it are.

In this way, Christ's bride has tasted rebellion and yet chosen full submission to Him. She has known sin, yet sought holiness with all her heart. When the profoundly wise work of God is finished within her, she will never again be attracted to sin.

God did all of His work knowing the high price He would have to pay. Allowing men and women access to sin would certainly result in their experiencing it. Therefore, this would cause not only their great suffering, but also necessitate the death of His own Son.

To have the wife, the eternal companion whom He so desired, would require His paying the highest price. What was most precious to Him would have to be sacrificed. His blood must be poured out upon the ground for God's ultimate purposes to be accomplished. The marriage contract came at the greatest possible cost. This is the blood of the covenant.

In the Garden of Eden, shortly after Adam and Eve sinned, God came to visit them. He fully saw and knew what they had done. They had disobeyed and rebelled

against Him. Thus their nakedness was exposed. Here, the Creator began teaching them about the price of sin. He began revealing the great cost required to resolve the problem. To cover them, God killed an innocent creature, probably a lamb, and made clothing for them. The shed blood of an innocent one covered the result of their sin, their nakedness.

No doubt this action was grievous to God. He had no desire to kill anything, especially one of these new creatures which He had made. God has no pleasure in killing and death, even the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11).

However, the situation demanded it. His lesson for Adam and Eve was clear: sin could only be covered by death. Imagine their shock. They had never witnessed death before that time. Nothing had ever been killed or died up until then. Surely, they realized that this death was a result of their sin.

This action of God's must have been extremely startling to Adam and Eve. These animals were their friends. They knew them all and probably had been caring for them in the Garden. This little fuzzy animal had done nothing wrong, yet because of their rebellion, its death was required. This action must have profoundly impacted the world's first couple. They began to realize the price of their sin.

Later, when God gave Moses the law, these same sentiments were expressed. Vegetables and fruits were not acceptable to atone for sin. Only by the offering of the blood of a pure and innocent creature, could sin be atoned. The Old Testament is full of ordinances and admonitions concerning the necessity of this offering.

As we all know, the fulfillment of this severe demand of the Most High was the offering of His own precious Son. Jesus Christ came to earth to die for us. He died in our place, shedding His blood so that the righteous requirement of God could be satisfied. No doubt, if the sacrifice of an animal was precious in God's sight, the blood of God's own Son is indescribably more precious. The value of such a sacrifice to God is beyond comprehension.

To us who are sinners, this offering is also of supreme value. The price which was paid was high enough to purge and forgive the most heinous sin. There is no one on the earth who cannot be forgiven. There is no sinner whose deeds are so awful that the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse him. What a glorious thing! We, who rebelled against God and sinned against Him in the most evil ways, can be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. There can be no doubt about this most glorious truth.

Most of the modern church today at least partially understands this fact. However, often it has taken it to an extreme where it has ceased to be true. Many Bible teachers have embellished facts about the precious blood of Jesus until they are no longer in harmony with the mind of God or His word.

For example, many teach that when we receive Jesus, He forgives all our sins, past, present and future. Now, they insist, there is nothing we can do or say which will change this fact. Another error which is commonly propagated today is that God cannot see our sin and therefore doesn't know when or if we sin, He only sees the blood of Jesus.

These assertions are not true. There are no verses in the Bible which state such things. Instead, the Bible is full of verses which show that God, in fact, sees everything.

It is a mistake to imagine that God no longer sees what we do because He has already forgiven us completely. Instead, we find many verses which say something entirely different. Therefore, let us take a little time to carefully examine the word of God together to discover what the truth of God really is.

CONVICTION OF SIN

Reading through the scriptures, we find God's wonderful, free forgiveness revealed. Yet, in order to receive this great forgiveness and to take part in this cleansing, we also find that there are some requirements. One of the more obvious of these is the fact that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us (Mt 6:15).

Here in the Bible, it is clearly stated that there is at least one condition we must fulfill for receiving God's forgiveness. All of our sins, past, present, and future certainly *can* be forgiven but just as certainly will not be unless we meet God's requirements. One such requirement is that we must forgive others.

Another requirement which comes to mind is the necessity for the sinner to be convicted of sin. Jesus stated: "And when He [the Comforter] has come, He will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment" (Jn 16:8). This deep sense of conviction of sin is the first step which enables us to receive forgiveness. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

When Peter was preaching to the multitudes on the day of Pentecost exposing their sin in crucifying Jesus, what was their response? They were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). They were convicted. They suddenly realized the depth of their wickedness. Without this deep conviction, they could not have then been prepared to receive forgiveness.

Let us think about this together. If you have never been convicted of your sin – not only what you have done, but also what you yourself are – then you have no need of a Savior. If you have not realized deeply and thoroughly in the light of God that you are sinful to the core, then you cannot think that you are worthy to die. Furthermore, if you are not worthy to die, then it is obviously not necessary for Someone to die in your place.

If you do not consider yourself worthy of the sentence of death, then you cannot need a Substitute to take your place in this execution. Therefore, since you do not consider yourself worthy of death, you have no need of a Savior to die for you so that you can be forgiven.

The blood of Jesus is not paint. It speaks of the death of someone. This Someone died for those who realize the evil tendencies of their own life and nature. They have been convicted of their sin. They are deeply sorry and realize that who and what they are is completely unworthy to live. Therefore, they are ready to receive the blood of

Someone else who died for them. From this position, they can receive forgiveness.

If you have never been convicted of sin, then you cannot have been forgiven and to this day you are still in your sins. It does not matter if you have "prayed the sinner's prayer." It makes no difference if you are a church member and attend regularly. Only those who realize that they are worthy to die for what they have done, and even what they are, are in a position to receive what Jesus has done for them.

In order to pray a prayer that will result in your forgiveness, you must first have had an encounter with God. And when God reveals Himself to man, with this comes conviction of sin. God is holy. He is pure and sinless. In fact, He hates sin. So, when He reveals Himself, this burning holiness of His character automatically reveals the sinfulness and impurity of the one to whom He is revealed.

Job said: "I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen You and I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6). How many so-called "Christians" today are in Job's position before God revealed Himself? They have "heard about God," and perhaps agreed mentally with what they have heard, but they have never "seen" Him. They have never really met Jesus. They have never been convicted of sin. In spite of the fact that the church which they attend is trying to assure them that they are forgiven and saved, the truth is they are not.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Speaking of this "assurance of salvation" and "assurance of forgiveness," the church has no right to be trying to assure anyone of any such thing. This is the work of God. Nowhere in the Bible is the church given the job of assuring people that they are right with God. The church's job is to bring men and women to Christ. Her work is to reveal Jesus in a powerful way through preaching and testifying so that people can "see" Him and meet Him.

It is Jesus' business to forgive the sinner and then give him a confidence that he has been forgiven. True assurance

of forgiveness comes from the presence of God. When anyone has a face-to-face interaction with Him, they are deeply convicted of their sin, yet they come away knowing – being fully assured in their hearts – that they have met Love and Forgiveness Himself. They have had a life-changing transaction with God.

Oh, how the churches today are full of those who have never been convicted of sin. They have no right to assurance of forgiveness. Yet they are convinced by man that they have it. Instead of laboring to bring people to God, far too many Christians are working to bring people into their “church.” Their goal is different from the Lord’s.

Their objective is to fill their building, multiply their numbers, and enlarge their “ministry.” They are working to make people feel comfortable and welcome. In fact, they will fight against any preaching which might make someone feel troubled or uneasy. And so they take the place of God. They offer “easy” forgiveness to anyone who will agree with them and join them. This is an ungodly work.

God’s thought, on the other hand, is completely different. It is to bring men and women to a conviction of sin. This is the clearly stated work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:8). Sinners need to be uncomfortable. The more uncomfortable the better. All the truly great revivals in Church history were characterized by this one thing: a deep agonizing conviction of sin on the part of the unbelievers.

It is right for the ungodly to be deeply convicted. It is good for them to agonize over their sinful condition. Profound sorrow is a wonderful sign of the work of the Spirit of God. When we find sinners in this state, let us not work to relieve them of this burden.

Our work, our only work, is to point them continually to the Savior until they themselves “do business” with Him, until they know for themselves that they have been forgiven and accepted. This will result in true, long-lasting conversion.

Another necessary step for receiving forgiveness is repentance. A deep conviction of sin results in repentance on the part of the sinner. When the multitude was convict-

ed or “pierced in their hearts” through Peter’s preaching, they immediately cried: “What shall we do?” Peter’s response to this was: “Repent... and be baptized.”

You see, repentance is the necessary result of a deep conviction of sin. Repentance means literally in the Greek language “to have a change of mind.” In other words you, being convicted of sin, resolve to never be involved in sin again. You change your attitude to hate what you have been and done and cry out to God to be completely free from such detestable behavior.

This, too, is a necessary step to receive forgiveness: the turning of the heart to decide never again to be involved in sin. Unless there is such an experience on the part of the sinner, forgiveness cannot be found.

To further illustrate this truth, let us look into the Old Testament. There, also, when a person made a sin offering, there was this essential requirement: this person must be repentant. He must admit his sin, be truly sorry for it and have the full intention of never doing it again.

Without this attitude, the offering which they made was not acceptable to God. It was a stink in His nostrils. Why should He, who made all things, want to see a precious, innocent animal killed for no reason? And why should killing a lamb relieve the person offering it of sin when in their hearts they were fully intending to keep on with their activities?

Instead of making them right with God, this sacrifice was a farce and was actually making things worse. Read Isaiah 66:3. God did not forgive these hypocrites. Instead, His judgment upon them was elevated.

Possibly many in the church today think that, while the blood of bulls and goats could not really “work” to hide the sins of those “not quite ready to change,” Jesus’ blood can because it is so much more effective. This, too, is a mistaken idea. Although the blood of Jesus is certainly much more “effective,” it hides from God only those sins for which we have truly repented.

While many Christians today say that “God doesn’t see our sin, but only the blood of Jesus,” the Bible teaches

that "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pr 15:3 KJV). And also, "...all things are naked and open {exposed} to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). You see, God knows our motives. He sees our heart. We never can fool Him, even if we can deceive ourselves.

Yes, once we have truly and thoroughly repented, our sins are removed from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps 103:12) and He remembers them no more. But this is a result of a broken and contrite heart. It is something which can and does happen to those who come to God with an honest {sincere} and "true heart" (Heb 10:22). When, in the light of God, we are convicted of what we have done and what we are and then truly repent, our sins are indeed forgiven and removed forever.

However, if God would not accept the blood of innocent animals to forgive unrepentant sinners, how much *less* will He accept the blood of His most precious Son to relieve unrepentant Christians from their just reward. If we are not ready and willing to fully and thoroughly repent and turn from our wicked ways, the blood of Jesus will do us absolutely no good.

It makes no difference if we were once born again. In fact, to try to take advantage of the precious blood of God's Son in this way will only make our situation worse. God is never mocked or deceived even if we are.

CONVICTION AND ACCUSATION

We must be careful to distinguish between the accusations of the devil in our conscience and the true conviction of sin. It is true that the devil can and does condemn us. When we respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit this brings us liberty, but listening to the voice of the accuser only brings us into bondage. We must learn to discern the voice of God in our conscience and refuse that of the enemy.

True repentance helps us here. When we have genuinely been convicted and repented before God, then we

have the armor necessary to withstand such accusations. Authentic, complete repentance not only makes us right with God, but it also gives us the ground to resist further attacks from the devil. When we have the confidence from God Himself that we are forgiven, then the enemy has very little to say.

However, too often, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is labeled by well-meaning Christians as “accusations” or “lies of the enemy.” We must be very careful not to refuse the conviction of the Spirit, labeling His work as “the devil.” Truthfully, the great problem in the church today is not too much false accusation but far too little real conviction and repentance.

The truths which we have been investigating here in this writing apply to believers as well as to unbelievers. The steps which are necessary to receive forgiveness are also for Christians. There are many church members today who, although at one time they were born again, are not thoroughly convicted of sin, not completely repentant, and therefore not totally forgiven. Many of God’s children are walking in sin and therefore are not, I repeat, NOT being forgiven by God.

Receiving eternal life does indeed require an initial conviction and repentance. However, the necessity of forgiveness does not stop there. Assuming that someone has truly been born into God’s family, there still remains the necessity for a continuing repentance.

Repentance for a believer is not merely a one-time occurrence but an ever deepening, daily experience. The more we grow spiritually, the closer we walk with the Light of the world, the more profoundly we sense our sinful state.

When I was a new Christian, I thought something like this: “After 20 or 30 years of walking with the Lord, I am going to be really holy.” But my experience after 40 years is: “I am truly wicked and worthy of death.” Yet from this position, I know that I am constantly being forgiven and cleansed. Praise God that as we “confess” our sin, He does two things. Not only does He forgive us for what we have

done, but also cleanses us from what we are (I Jn 1:9).

In I John 1:7 we see that there is yet another important requirement necessary for us to be forgiven. From this passage it is obvious that forgiveness is not just a “one-time thing.” It is an ongoing experience for every true believer.

John teaches us that: “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light... the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” The word “if” here indicates that there is definitely a prerequisite for our cleansing.

To “walk in the light” means that we are being constantly illuminated by the light of Jesus’ countenance. We are living in His presence every day. Thus, every thought, attitude, and action is being revealed to us for what it is by the expression of His face.

If and when these are sinful, then we can repent afresh and experience the marvelous forgiveness and cleansing which is freely given to us in Christ. For a believer to live in forgiveness, He must also walk in God’s presence, responding continually to any conviction of sin when and if it occurs.

GOD’S JUDGMENT

Everyone will be judged by God. Every man and woman who has ever lived on the earth will stand before Him one day. All unbelievers will appear before what is known as the “great white throne” (Rev 20:11). There, all those who have hated and rejected Christ will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). Yet, 1,000 years before this event, God’s own children will also be judged. They will stand before the “judgment seat of Christ” (II Cor 5:10).

Here, those whose deeds are good will be blessed, but those whose deeds were evil will be punished. (Biblically, the word “reward” does not mean only good things but indicates that we will get what we justly deserve. See II Tim 4:14).

However, let us be very, very clear about one thing. This punishment of God’s disobedient sons and daughters is not the same as the judgment of unbelievers. No believ-

er will ever be lost. None of God's children will be eternally tormented.

Please think with me through the following train of logic. If we are forgiven for our sins, then they will not and cannot be judged because our judgment has fallen on Another. But if we are still walking in sin – that is we are still unconvicted, unrepentant, and therefore unforgiven – we must certainly be judged for these sins. God would be unjust not to judge unforgiven sin.

If we have failed to meet Jesus' criteria for forgiveness, the only alternative is that we will be judged and therefore receive the punishment we deserve. This is true for believers as well as unbelievers, it is just that the punishment is different.

When we as believers are not "walking in the light" and therefore not living daily in repentance and forgiveness, then we have something very terrible to look forward to. Hebrews 10:26,27 reads: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation."

You see, the sacrifice of Jesus is only for those who have repented of their sins and therefore received forgiveness. The "we" mentioned here can only refer to believers, since unbelievers have clearly not "received" the truth.

The most severe punishment for believers is what we have already studied in the chapter entitled the "The Judgment Seat of Christ." There, we understood that the untransformed soul life of believers will be consumed and therefore lost before the presence of God Almighty. This destruction of the soul is the direct result of not living in repentance and therefore not receiving the forgiveness and cleansing we so desperately need.

What is not forgiven will be judged and punished. What has been forgiven will already have been cleansed and transformed.

There are actually several other consequences for disobedient believers, but there is not space here in this writing to detail them. For a better understanding of this sub-

ject, please refer to my previous book entitled *Thy Kingdom Come*.

THE MEANS TO AN END

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Jesus came to earth and died for a purpose. This eternal purpose was to redeem and prepare a bride for Himself. It was not simply to rescue a bunch of sinners by forgiving them. Forgiveness was not the goal; it was only the means to an end.

This end was to change these sinners into His own likeness by giving them access to His own life and nature in order to prepare a bride for Himself. His wonderful forgiveness was just the first step. This cleansing by His blood opened the way for us to enter into intimate fellowship with the Father. And through this communion, we can be changed into all that He is.

Consequently, when we stand before God, we will not be able to use the blood of Jesus to excuse ourselves from doing the very thing for which the blood was shed! We cannot expect to be forgiven for ignoring the very reason for which we were forgiven.

To help the reader understand this, let me use the following illustration. Let us suppose that someone bought for you a ticket to the next Olympic games. He paid for the airfare. He bought you tickets to see all the events. He arranged for your hotel and all your food for free. He even provided you with extra cash to use for your own pleasure and enjoyment.

Naturally, you would thank him and tell him how much you appreciated this wonderful, free gift. You might even write them a thank-you note just to let him know how really grateful you were.

But now let us suppose that when the time came for the Games, you did not go. You got busy with your garden or your hobby. You just did not make the effort to get on the plane and go. What would this show? It would indicate that you did not really appreciate the gift. Even though you acted as though it was important to you, it really was

not. You treated the present as an ordinary, common object of no special value. You have insulted your friend and trampled his gift underfoot.

So when he comes to see you to find out how you enjoyed the Olympics, what are you going to say? Will he accept the ticket back as an excuse for not going? Will the fact that he bought you the ticket at great personal expense and sacrifice generate in his heart forgiveness for your negligence? Never!

Now our God has provided us with an indescribable opportunity. With His own blood He has purchased for us the possibility to partake of all that He is. This is the most valuable gift anyone can give, paid for at the highest cost. The God of the universe has opened the way for us, small insignificant human beings, to grow up into His fullness.

But let us suppose we don't. Let us imagine that there are a few Christians who are neglecting to take advantage of this great gift. Instead they are living for themselves and serving their natural appetites. Perhaps they go to church regularly. It may be that they have no "gross" sins evident in their lives. But they are not pressing on into Christ and being transformed into His image. They are focused on earthly things and so are not progressing spiritually.

When Jesus comes, will these people be able to "plead the blood" to excuse themselves for their fleshly lifestyle? Before the judgment seat will Jesus accept the precious blood which bought them the right to enter in to excuse them for not entering? I think not. We will not escape His judgment "if we neglect so great a salvation" (Heb 2:3).

Whoever abuses the grace of God to live only for themselves and then hopes that His blood will cover them for doing this will be surprised before His judgment seat. The "age of grace" will then be over. The opportunity for repentance and forgiveness is then past.

On that day, the throne of grace will be replaced by the throne of judgment. There, in His presence, we will answer for what we did with the grace and forgiveness which were available to us. We read: "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy

who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay says the Lord.' And again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:29-31). (See also Heb 6:4-8).

Let us also review again Hebrews 10:26, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." This verse is not addressing the Christian who slips up once in a while and sins, even though he knows it is wrong.

"Sinning willfully" here is referring to persistent, unrepentant sin. It is speaking about the very subject we are discussing. You see, if you try to deceive God and use the precious blood of His son to excuse yourself from entering into His eternal plan, the result is "fearful" "judgment" and "fiery" devouring. God, indeed, is not mocked; whatever we sow, that shall we also reap (Gal 6:7,8).

Dear friends, these are serious considerations with eternal consequences. May God grant us all abundant grace that we may gain all that He has for us – a complete salvation – so that we will not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

10.

DIVIDING SOUL AND SPIRIT (1)

*W*hen a person is born again, the Spirit of God enters into their human spirit. There, an eternal union is made. The Bible teaches us that: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit [with the Lord]" (I Cor 6:17). The spirit of that individual, which previously was deadened and darkened, becomes alive with the Life of God.

Here, in the "Holy of Holies" of our being, God takes up residence. Here then is the location of the new Life within us. It is in our human spirit which has been "joined" to God's Holy Spirit.

This new ZOË Life which we now have in our spirit is morally superior to our natural life in every way. In every aspect of living it expresses the divine nature of God. Therefore, when we live by this Life, we express righteousness. When we live by our spirit, we manifest the nature of God. This is truly what the Father is seeking – those through whom He can reveal Himself to the world.

But you will remember that we also have within us an old PSUCHË life. This life resides in our soul and can be most clearly described as our "soul life." As we have seen in the preceding chapters, this natural, human life invariably expresses the fallen, sinful nature. Therefore, when we live by our soul, we manifest "self" and sin.

We have then two sources or “fountains” of life inside of us with two different natures. When one or the other of these lives is active, its own nature is expressed. Consequently, every Christian has a daily, desperate need to be able to discern when he or she is living by the soul or living by the spirit. We urgently need to experience within us the “dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12).

Since living by our spirit or living by our soul produces such vastly different results, it is of the utmost importance that we be able to discern which is which. We need to know when each one is active. Sadly, many believers today do not even know that such a distinction exists. But if we do not know when we are “in the spirit” or when we are living by the soul, we truly are walking in spiritual darkness and do not know where we are going (Jn 12:35).

Our God is light (I Jn 1:5) and He certainly desires in these last days to illuminate His children so that they can also walk in the light and not be stumbling around in confusion and darkness. In these next two chapters, therefore, we will concentrate on this issue: what it means to be in the spirit and what it means to be living by our soul.

One misunderstanding which needs to be addressed from the beginning is that the Holy Spirit is often perceived as something outside of us which “comes upon us” occasionally. While this may have been true in the Old Testament times, the New Covenant experience is quite different.

The Holy Spirit has already been poured out on the day of Pentecost and now is on the inside of every believer. He is not something (Someone) which we are waiting to receive externally, but which we have already received internally. He does not come and go, but dwells permanently within every believer. While our experience of His presence may vary – that is, we may “sense” His presence more or less strongly – He is always in our spirit.

It is when the Holy Spirit “moves out” from our spirit and fills our soul that we experience Him with our natural senses. This may “feel” like He has come upon us, but in fact, He has simply “spread out” from the holy of holies

into the holy place. In fact, the Holy Spirit can also fill the "outer court," referring to our physical bodies (Rm 8:11).

We are going to be speaking about these "more outward" experiences later on; however, here in this chapter we must concentrate on the experiences which we can have of the Holy Spirit in our spirit. It is here that the presence of God resides, and it is here that the Source of divine Life dwells. Therefore, it is essential for every believer to know how to discern whether or not they are in the spirit or merely living by their soul.

Some believers may not understand clearly the use of the terms in the scriptures: "in the spirit" and "in the Spirit." Perhaps the following explanation will help give a clearer picture. In the New Testament, when a capital "S" is used in the word Spirit, it indicates the Holy Spirit. When a small "s" is used, it indicates the spirit of man or the "human spirit."

Interestingly, in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written, there were no "small" letters. All the letters were "capitals." Therefore, in order to determine whether the text is referring to the human spirit or the Holy Spirit, the translators had to rely on the context. Occasionally, even from the context, it is virtually impossible to discern whether the writer was speaking about the human spirit or the Holy Spirit.

However, for us there need be no confusion. These two spirits, God's and man's, have now been "joined" as one within us (I Cor 6:17). Therefore, when we are "in the Spirit" we are in the human spirit also and when we are "in our spirit" we are in the Holy Spirit too.

All genuine Christian life is lived "by the spirit." That is, it is an exhibition of the Life which is emanating from our spirit. We are instructed to "walk in the spirit" (Gal 5:16,25). We are exhorted to be "led by the Spirit" (Rm 8:14). We most certainly must "worship God in the spirit" (Jn 4:24), since that is the only worship which is acceptable to Him. Paul states that he served God "with his spirit" (Rm 1:9) and that we too should serve Him "in newness of the spirit" (Rm 7:6).

We must “live according to the Spirit” (Rm 8:12). Our ministry must be of the “Spirit” (Gal 3:5). Our lives should be exhibiting the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). It is important for us to “sow to the Spirit” (Gal 6:8). Our unity in Christ with other believers is “in the Spirit” (Eph 4:3).

We must pray in the Spirit (Eph 6:18), “stand fast in one spirit” (Philip 1:27), have the “fellowship of the Spirit” (Philip 2:1), “love in the Spirit,” (Col 1:8) and many other such things. Truly, the source of all real Christianity is “in the (S)pirit.”

With all this in mind, how can a Christian know when he is in the spirit? To investigate this question more thoroughly, let us return to the tabernacle which God instructed Moses to build. As we have seen in chapter 6, this structure was divided into three parts corresponding to the three parts of man: body, soul and spirit. It had an outer court, a holy place, and a holy of holies.

It is this innermost section which speaks to us of the human spirit – the dwelling place of God Almighty. In this most holy place, God instructed Moses to put the Ark of the Covenant. On the top of the ark were two cherubim of gold, one on each end, with their wings stretched out, covering the place where the glory of God appeared.

Within this ark were placed three items: a golden pot full of manna, Aaron's rod which budded, blossomed, and bore ripe almonds and, lastly, the two tablets of stone upon which were written the ten commandments.

These items were not randomly chosen but have important spiritual significance. These things were not just Jewish religious relics but still speak to us today. Significantly, some Bible teachers have isolated three functions of the human spirit. That is, in our spirit we have three “abilities.”

These three functions correspond to the three items which were placed in the Ark of the covenant. These things are very important for us to understand because when we are experiencing these three “items” in our daily lives, we can know that we are “in the spirit” and therefore that we are in the presence of God.

GOLDEN POT OF MANNA (COMMUNION)

The first function of our human spirit is the capability of having communion with God. This is signified to us by the presence of the golden pot full of manna. Obviously, this manna speaks to us of the “heavenly bread that came down” (Jn 6:41), indicating feasting on the Lord Jesus. This celestial nourishment truly came in a golden container, representing the purity and incorruptibility of Christ.

In chapter 4, we have discussed in some detail about the spiritual reality of communion with God and how we can grow in this most important experience. If you are uncertain about this, please review the sections of chapter 4 about communion.

Communion means having fellowship with God. When we are in the Spirit, and therefore in our spirit, we have fellowship with God. We sense His presence within us. We have a kind of continual dialogue in prayer. (See I Thess 5:17). This communion with the Most High is a sure indication that we are in the spirit. It must serve as a kind of guidepost for us in our Christian life.

If this intimate fellowship and sense of His presence is lacking, then this is an indication that something is wrong. In some way, we are not where we should be. It is plainly God’s will that all of His children should “walk in the spirit” (Gal 5:16), thus indicating that this should be a normal, continuing experience for all believers.

To be “in the spirit” is not meant to be a once-in-a-while “blessing” but a daily, constant walk. Our communion with God is the source from which flows all true Christian work and virtue.

This then is the true test. To walk in the spirit is to live in close communion with God. Those who have this communion know how to eat of Him. They know how to drink of His Spirit and they know how to “live by” Him (Jn 6:57). If, on the other hand, you are not walking daily in intimacy with God and so do not know this sense of His presence, then it is quite certain that you are not walking in the Spirit.

The only alternative is that you are living in the flesh, being guided by the life of the soul. Now the soul can appear very religious and can seem to do many things “for God.” Church attendance, tithing, Bible reading, praying, being “active” in the service of God – these things can all be done by the efforts of the soul.

But the only source of genuine Christianity is the Spirit of God which lives in our human spirit. To be approved by God, all our words, thoughts, and actions must be the result of our intimate fellowship with Him in the Spirit. To live in and by the spirit, we must be in communion with God. This is the significance of the golden pot full of manna.

THE ROD OF AUTHORITY (INTUITION)

The second item in the ark is Aaron’s rod. This staff was the symbol of divine authority – of the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Within our spirit, we also find this important function. When we are in God’s presence, we often sense His leading and direction. We will call this function “intuition.”

When we are in communion with God, somehow, in an indefinable way, we know what it is that He wants us to do. Perhaps we feel an inclination to pray. Maybe we sense a need to go visit someone or to go out evangelizing. An infinite number of instructions can be communicated to us by God while we are in the spirit. This is what it means to “walk with the Lord.”

It is while we are living in constant communion with Him that He directs our lives through the leadership of the Spirit. This does not mean that we “hear voices” or necessarily know exactly what to do. It is simply that we sense an inclination, a desire, or a spiritual impulse to do or say a particular thing. This is the function of intuition in our spirit.

I am not discounting the fact that God can and does use outward things like circumstances, finances, and even occasionally “fleeces” to guide our steps. But I do insist

that our primary source of direction be the Spirit of God within our spirit. If we rely on superficial “happenings,” feelings, coincidences, dreams, prophecies, etc. for spiritual direction, then we are already walking in deception. You will always find that when outward circumstances are being used by God to direct you, in your spirit you will also have a “witness.” You will always have a spiritual peace.

When these two things are in conflict (i.e. “outward leading” such as prophecies or random occurrences and the inner peace of the Holy Spirit in your spirit), the most reliable source of guidance is the peace of God within. The Bible teaches us that we are to let the peace of God “rule” or arbitrate in our hearts (Col 3:15). This means that as the official at some sports event has the final say, so too the peace of God in our spirit should be the ultimate judge.

Never trust the opinions of others when you do not have rest in your spirit. Disobeying the inner sense of God’s leading in your spirit can lead you to disaster. Please take this admonition from someone who has erred many times in this way and lived to regret it.

When we believe that God has given us some direction in our spirit, it is never wrong to want it confirmed. We can look first to the Scriptures to see if what we think is His voice harmonizes with what He has spoken to us through the written page. If it does, then it is probably His voice we are hearing. If not, then our impulses are wrong and we must begin again to seek His direction.

We can also ask God to confirm His direction through any number of ways which He may choose. Also, we can ask the advice of other believers whom we know to be spiritually mature and sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Those most mature will not be quick to give advice but will help you sort out what God is really saying to you.

Although the Lord often will use leaders to give us guidance, the man of God must never rely on another man but seek the face of God himself until he has assurance in his own heart about the direction of the Spirit. This is not a license for rebellion, but an admonition to clearly hear God

yourself. Remember, it is to Him that we will answer for every deed.

The experience of the leadership of the Holy Spirit within our spirit is the experience of Aaron's rod. When we are in God's presence and having spiritual communion with Him, we will have an "intuition" about what to do. In this way we can be led by the Spirit. This experience grows stronger as we grow spiritually. As we mature, this sensitivity to the Spirit's direction also becomes clearer and more defined.

In this way, our Lord can lead us in an increasingly "detailed" way. Even the expression of His face or the look of His eyes can let us know of His displeasure or approval. This growing ability to know and sense the leadership of the Holy Spirit is a sign of spiritual maturity. Those who are led by the Spirit are, indeed, the mature sons of God (Rm 8:14).

When we are "intuiting" or sensing the leadership of God within us, then we know that we are in the spirit since this is one of the functions of the spirit. But if we wish to stay in the spirit, that is to live in the presence of God consistently, then we must obey what the Spirit is saying. This is an important spiritual principle.

If we do not listen to God and do what He wishes, then it will become impossible for us to live in His presence. When we are disobedient, our fellowship with God becomes difficult, if not impossible. This is because the more deeply we enter into His presence, the louder the rod of Aaron speaks. The more we wish to be intimate with Him, the more His authority is known.

If we have been disobedient to Him, the only solution is repentance. This means asking for forgiveness and also deciding to do whatever it is that God is asking us to do. How many believers today are living soulish lives because they will not obey the voice of the Lord! Perhaps they try to follow superficial, religious ordinances and formulas but inwardly they know that they are not right with God.

The only alternative for disobedient Christians is to live by the soul life. Oh, they may "break through" into the

Spirit once in a while during times of worship or prayer. But they cannot comfortably stay in the presence of God while His rod of authority is speaking.

Think about it. If God tells you to go to China and serve Him and you do not go, will you maintain the same sweet intimacy with Him? When He says "no" to something we want, and we go ahead and do it anyway, can we remain in His presence while rebelling against Him? Perhaps we imagine that the sacrifice of Jesus will be enough to restore our fellowship with Him.

But do you remember King Saul and his offerings to God? What was the Divine response? "To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams" (I Sam 15:22). To restore your fellowship with God requires not only Jesus' sacrifice but also obedience.

It is impossible to live in disobedience to God and also live in the spirit. A rebellious son or daughter will never feel comfortable in His presence. To walk in intimacy with Him, you must also obey Him and do whatever He asks. He must really be the Lord of your life.

TABLETS OF STONE (CONSCIENCE)

In the ark of the covenant we also can find the two tablets of stone upon which the finger of God wrote the ten commandments. This was the law of God. But today we have another law. This one is not written in stone but upon hearts of flesh (Heb 8:10). This is a function of our spirit which we will call "conscience."

This "part" of the spirit, the conscience, seems to operate to a very limited extent even before a person is born again. Perhaps God allowed this glimmering, smoldering vestige of spiritual light within man to help him be aware of his sin.

However, once we are born again, this part of our spirit becomes more and more active. We become increasingly aware of when we offend our Lord or someone else. Many times, no one has to tell us that we have done or spoken something wrong. Perhaps we have done nothing

which is against the written code of the law. But deep within our spirit we know that we have offended our precious Savior. How do we know? It is because this part of our spirit, our conscience, is speaking. The “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2) written within us is operating.

This function of the spirit is very important. This “ability” to know when we are pleasing to God or not, lies at the very core of our relationship with Him. Our God is a living person and so we need to take care of our relationship with Him just as we would with a good friend or spouse.

If we have offended or angered someone with whom we have a close relationship, then we need to get things right with them if we are to continue to have intimacy with them. It is no different with God. We cannot expect to have a close, personal relationship with Him when we are offending His person.

For example, when you are having sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend with whom you are not married, can you also live in His presence? Will “pleading the blood of Jesus” make Him blind to your behavior which is an offense to His holiness? No! We can only be right with our Lord by actually being right with Him.

When we have erred in our attitudes, thoughts, words, or actions, this “conscience” part of our spirit becomes active. It works to convict us of sin. And when it does, then it becomes necessary to deal with this sin in the light of God.

This involves repentance and a decision never to offend our Lord in this manner again. It involves not only saying we are sorry to Him but actually *being* sorry. If we do not work to maintain this kind of clear relationship with Jesus, we will find it impossible to live in the spirit. When our conscience speaks to us, we must take all the necessary steps to make things right.

REMEMBERING OUR BROTHER

Not only is this true in our relationship with God, but He also requires that we maintain right relationships with

others. If in our daily life we offend others in some way, we must also do whatever is necessary to make things right with them.

We read in Mt 5:23: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." To "bring your gift to the altar" in today's Christian experience means that we come into God's presence to worship Him and have communion with Him. Our "gift" is the blood of Jesus.

But why is it that when we are in our Lord's presence we suddenly begin to "remember" our brother? This is because in His presence our conscience begins to speak. The more closely we approach His throne, the louder the voice of conscience in our spirit becomes. The only solution to this is to go and get things right with those whom we have offended. Then we can come back and offer our gift.

This is an absolutely essential spiritual principle. Without knowing and following our conscience, we will go nowhere spiritually. It is impossible to walk in communion with God when our conscience is troubling us. The more we try to come into the presence of God, the louder our conscience will speak. No one can endure staying in His presence while their conscience is condemning them.

Paul, the apostle, was keenly aware of this fact. He said: "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense towards God and men" (Acts 24:16). For him the question of a clean, clear conscience was of utmost importance – a matter of daily exercise.

If, then, we have offended God, we need to get right with God. If we have offended men, we need to do whatever it takes to get right with them also. Simply repenting before God is not enough. When there are other people involved, we also must get things right with them.

This means that we must go to them, apologize for what we have done, and ask for their forgiveness. If face-to-face contact is not possible, we need to telephone, write a letter, or do whatever we can do to make things right. A

good conscience is so important that neglecting it can make a “shipwreck” of our faith (I Tim 1:19).

Many times our flesh resists confessing our guilt to other men and women. The problem is our pride. In order to repent, we must humble ourselves and admit that our attitudes, actions and words were ungodly. They were selfish, sinful, and caused harm to others. This harm might be emotional, physical or financial.

In whatever manner we have offended someone else, we must at all costs go to them and repent. We must make things right as much as is possible and ask for their forgiveness.

This humbling of ourselves is absolutely essential if we are to maintain our fellowship with God. He “resists the proud” (I Pet 5:5) but is happy to have fellowship with the humble. The cleansing of our conscience will open up new vistas of communion with our God.

DEALING WITH THE PAST

This necessity of making things right with others applies to the past as well as the present. Far too many believers are “trying to go on with the Lord” without ever repenting and making things right from their past. They are dragging a huge amount of heavy baggage behind them and making very little progress spiritually.

Many such people think that once they become a Christian, all their past is forgiven and forgotten. This is perhaps an agreeable idea, but it is not completely true. On God’s part, when we have confessed and repented for all of our past sins, indeed they are forgiven. But on man’s part, we also need to go to them and repent. There can be no “going on” without first going back.

The word of God is clear: “God requires that which is past” (Ec 3:15). This means that we must go to those against whom we have sinned, repent, ask forgiveness, and then do whatever we can to make things right. If we have stolen anything, we need to restore the item or the value of it in money, investing whatever time, expense and

effort this takes. If we have wounded someone emotionally, then we must admit our errors and ask forgiveness.

Whether or not they also wounded us has no bearing on the situation. Whether they also repent does not change what we need to do. No sin is justified by what others have done to us.

Let us examine some illustrations here to make these points more clear. Suppose someone robbed a bank. Then the next day, this person receives new Life in Jesus Christ. Does he get to keep the money? Since some insist that he is now forgiven completely, so can he then forget the robbery and live off the loot? No!

Let us then think of someone who divorced their marriage partner in the past simply to pursue their own satisfaction and fleshly desires. What does God think about this offense? Can it be that He doesn't know how the other was hurt, offended, and even devastated emotionally? Will He be happy to have intimate fellowship with you while this other person whom He loves has not been taken care of?

So then what must be done? This person needs to enter into contact with the person who was offended, admit every last part of their guilt for the failed relationship, and ask forgiveness. It makes no difference if the other person also had failings. This fact does not even enter into our considerations. Our part is the part which needs repentance and forgiveness.

When we have sinned against another, we need to do whatever we can to make things right. If it is money, we need to repay (Lk 19:8). If we have defamed someone, we need to let the truth be known to all who were affected by our lies. As a general rule, if we have sinned publicly, we must also repent publicly. If our sin was private, we must go in private to those who were affected. Whenever possible we need to restore to others what we have taken, be it money, reputation, or property.

Obviously, there are some situations which are impossible to restore. If we have killed someone we cannot bring them back to life. If we have caused someone to become pregnant or we have become pregnant outside the mar-

riage bond, there is no way to undo this fact without sinning. We must do whatever is possible to restore when and where we can. Undoubtedly the Lord will give us wisdom in these things, showing us how and when to restore. If our hearts are truly humble and willing, He will help us to completely clear our consciences.

Certainly there are some who have what could be called "weak" consciences. They are susceptible to the accusations of the enemy. They live in continual guilt and condemnation. For them, taking all the available steps they can to clear their conscience will help them in their fight.

Knowing that they have done everything to clear their past and present relationship with God and others will give them a good basis to resist further accusations. It is also possible, and even common, that some live in condemnation for things about which God is not convicting them because, hidden in their hearts, there are other things which they do not wish to bring into the light. This weakens their conscience and makes it vulnerable to false accusations.

To live and walk in the Spirit, these experiences of the manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of stone are absolutely necessary. Without them, the only alternative is to live and walk in the soul. The result of a refusal to yield to God in these matters has two possible results.

The first occurs when the person who is rebelling against God admits this to themselves and simply stops trying to follow Jesus. The second happens when the person resisting the authority of the Most High tries to pretend that he is still O.K. He hides his rebellion from himself and others, trying to act as if he is still a "good Christian" and feigning that nothing is wrong.

This individual will then develop a merely soulish religion. By this I mean that they will still try with the efforts of the soul to obey biblical principles, go to church meetings, and do the things which other Christians expect of them.

However, all this will then be done without intimate fellowship with God and so can only be accomplished by

human strength and natural effort. The results may appear to be good imitations of real spiritual life, but the flavor is different. Instead of the sweet fragrance of Christ, there is the dead, dry sense of demand. In place of the flowing of the water of Life, there is the execution of "duty." The person involved is often still trying to serve God but not really submitting themselves completely to Him.

It is essential for every Christian to learn to walk in the spirit. To be pleasing to God there is no other way. We can know that we are in the spirit, not by physical sensations, hearing "voices" or having strong emotional feelings, but by the spiritual experiences of the manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of stone.

When we are having spiritual communion with Jesus, when we are sensing His leadership, and when we know if we are offending Him, are sure indications that we are in the (S)pirit. And it is from the spirit that all of His virtue will flow. May God have mercy upon us that we could learn to live daily in His presence so that from our spirit His Spirit can manifest His life through us.

11.

DIVIDING SOUL AND SPIRIT (2)

*I*n the last chapter we examined the importance of living by and in the (S)pirit. There we saw that it is from the Spirit of God within our spirit that His life flows through us. However, we are not merely spirit beings. We also have a soul. And it is through this soul (and ultimately through our physical body) that what we are inside is expressed to the world.

In a man or woman who does not know Christ, the soul is the leading “organ” within their being. Having no Life in the spirit, they have no choice but to live by the soul-life and express the fallen nature. Their soul is the dominant force in their being.

However, once we receive Jesus, this “seat of government” is supposed to change. Now the soul, instead of being in the lead, is meant to become subjugated to the spirit. The soul is to become the servant of the spirit, being directed and controlled by a higher source. The Life of God within us begins to use the faculties of the soul to express the divine nature to the world.

To understand this a little more clearly, it is important to state that the soul has three distinct “capabilities” or faculties. These are: the ability to think, the ability to feel, and the ability to decide. The easiest way to remember this is

that we have a mind, we have emotions, and we have a will. Most Bible teachers today agree on this point that man's soul has these three parts: mind, emotions and will.

There is nothing inherently wrong with these "faculties." They were created by God and are necessary for every part of our living. Obviously, everyone must think, feel, and decide. The problem is in which "life" is animating or using these capabilities. When the old, PSUCHÊ life is in control, sin results. When the ZOË life dominates, righteousness is manifested.

Whatever thoughts, feelings, and decisions initiate in our soul cannot please God. This is because this source is contaminated with sin. But when our thoughts, feelings, and decisions flow from the spirit, they are a manifestation of God.

Therefore, what we need in our soul is a transfer of leadership. We need to "change sources" so to speak. We must learn to allow the Spirit of God to fill, dominate, and use the faculties of the soul. In this way we can fulfill all of His marvelous plans.

Consequently, as we saw in the last chapter, there is an urgent need – a desperate necessity – for every child of God to know when he or she is living by the soul life or by the spirit. We must experience within our being the "dividing asunder of the soul and spirit" (Heb 4:12). We must be able to know when we are being animated by the old life and when we are experiencing the new.

Without this most important understanding, we can only wander in the darkness, stumbling once in a while into the presence of God, perhaps not knowing how or why we got there, and then stumbling out again without a clue as to how to return. Unfortunately, this is the state of many of God's children. For many, this lack of light is their constant experience.

Since this dividing between the soul and the spirit is so important, we are going to spend time here speaking in more detail about it. In the last chapter we spoke about what it means to be in the spirit. Here we will investigate how this can effect each separate "part" of our soul.

THE MIND

We will begin our discussion by speaking about the mind. In an unsaved person, this faculty is usually the dominant one. Ephesians 2:3 speaks of the people of the world who are under the control of the enemy and live fulfilling the desires of the flesh (i.e. the body) and of the mind. Further in Ephesians 4:17,18 we read that the "...rest of the Gentiles" (in this case the unsaved) "walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God."

So we understand that without God's life, the only option the unbeliever has is to be guided by his mind. This results only in darkness. No matter how "enlightened" the people of the world think that they are, compared to the true spiritual realities, they are only in darkness. The wisdom and intelligence of the fallen race do not lead them to God and are only foolishness in His sight (I Cor 3:19; 1:21).

When a person comes to Christ, therefore, they have the long ingrained habit of living by and depending upon their mind. This has always been what they have relied upon and so they often continue living in this way.

For this reason, Christianity becomes a mental exercise for them. They suppose that "growing in Christ" is a learning process. Depending upon their natural intelligence and ability, they begin to study the things of God and read the Bible with the thought that when they have accumulated enough knowledge, this will enable them to walk in God's ways.

They read, they study, and they memorize. Perhaps they go to Bible school. They buy many Christian books and accumulate literature. They gather information about "how to" act and react in every situation of life. They know "how to" lead, "how to" teach, "how to" cast out demons, "how to" worship, "how to" disciple, "how to" heal the sick, "how to" have meetings, "how to" deal with this or that situation or this or that kind of person, and many other such things. They become full of knowledge about God and this knowledge forms the basis of their spiritual life.

These people, then, have a mental kind of Christianity. It is a product of their mind. As we examined in chapter 3 with respect to the significance of the two trees, this is a result of living in independence from God. Once we “know how” to do things, we can then live and act without any dependence on the Spirit whatsoever.

This is what it means to walk in the soul. It is to rely upon our mind instead of the Spirit. It is to walk by the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life. The “Christianity” produced by this kind of activity does not please the Father. It is a kind of dry, human imitation of a true spiritual walk. It is a natural effort to please God without really submitting to Him. I Corinthians 8:2 reads: “If anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”

Please don't get me wrong. Many of these individuals mean well. They have a real desire to please the Lord. But so did Paul when he was persecuting believers before he was converted. The problem is not with their desire but with their understanding. Good intentions combined with spiritual darkness will never arrive at God's goal.

The Pharisees were trying to please God. They not only read the scriptures but they studied them diligently all the time. But when the Living Word appeared, they were bound up in their human mind and could not recognize Him. They opposed Him to the death. Jesus said to them: “You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life... but you are not willing to come to me that you may have [ZOË] life” (Jn 5:39,40).

Those Christians who walk by their mind often fail to recognize Him when He appears. Not knowing how to walk in the spirit, they are left only with mental analysis which is useless when it comes to discerning spiritual things. Sometimes they, too, join in to persecute those who are led by the Spirit of God.

Truly the “carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rm 8:7). This means that those whose minds are under the control of their soul life are in opposition to and even at war with all that God is doing here on the earth.

THE LAMPSTAND

Let us go on from here to speak about God's plan for our mind. God Himself created our mind so there must be a divine purpose for it. Clearly He does not want us to be ignorant or stupid. He has no use for witless followers who simply do what someone else tells them or who pursue every impulse without thinking. His plan is not for us to become "mindless" but to have our mind filled with and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:23 teaches us that we need to be "renewed in the spirit of our mind." Does our mind have its own spirit? No. What this means is that the Holy Spirit can "move out" from the holy of holies and fill our mind. As we submit ourselves to Him, He begins to dominate and rule over our thoughts.

Our mind then becomes the servant of the spirit. Instead of being in front, doing its own thinking and deciding, the mind becomes a tool through which the Spirit can express Himself. We must learn how to let the Spirit use our mind, filling it with His thoughts, His opinions, and His understanding.

This is the experience of the lampstand. This lampstand of which we speak was a piece of furniture which God instructed Moses to put in the holy place of the Tabernacle. The "holy place" is the area located just outside of the holy of holies and speaks to us of our soul. This lampstand was always lighted, burning with holy oil.

When God fills our mind, He gives us enlightenment. Our spiritual eyes are opened and we understand things which are not of this world. Thus we have "light." This understanding is not a product of study, memorization, or mental effort. It is the result of the Holy Spirit filling our mind.

The revelation which we have is not something which we have "learned" mentally but something which we have been shown spiritually. Instead of having information about God, we receive the revelation of God. Obviously,

He may use many different ways to reveal things to us. This may come through books, especially the Bible. It may be the product of someone else's preaching or teaching. However, it will never be the result of mental exercise and human ability but of the opening and submitting of our mind to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches us that "we have the mind of Christ" (I Cor 2:16). For far too many, this is only a teaching and has no real meaning in their daily lives. But for those who are filled with the Spirit, it has profound significance. This means that we actually can experience the mind of God filling and using our mind.

Instead of trying to "think as He would think" we can have His very thoughts and opinions flowing within us. In every situation of life, we can receive divine instructions. This applies not only to "spiritual things" but even to our common, everyday thinking. Walking in the spirit, we do not function by what we have learned or what we think but by His moment-by-moment leading. "Knowledge" is not our source. Instead, our actions and words are governed by God Himself.

THE EMOTIONS

There are other believers who have no liking for study. They have little interest in any kind of "mental" Christianity. Their mind is not and has never been very dominant in their lives. Instead, they are governed by their feelings. When these individuals become Christians, they then have a tendency to be guided by emotions.

When they "feel like" doing something, they do it. When they do not "feel like" it, then they don't. When something gives them good feelings, then the thing must be of God. When something does not give them pleasurable sensations, then it must not be from Him. Such believers are not being led by the Spirit.

These believers are actually walking in the flesh. They judge every meeting, teaching, or experience by what kind of feelings it produces within their emotions. Perhaps

these believers even think it to be unspiritual to use their mind at all. They simply accept what makes them feel good without any examination of the source or content.

Emotional pleasure or happiness is not the true test of what is from God. Emotions can come from a great variety of sources. Sights, sounds, aromas, entertainment, and many other things can give us good feelings. Evil spirits can produce good feelings. Sex produces good feelings. Shouting, loud singing, strenuous dancing and jumping, intense shaking – all these things can produce a euphoria within the human being. People attend sporting events because they enjoy the “high” they get from the intensity of being in a crowd and having noisy stimulation.

Many of God’s children spend their spiritual lives pursuing exactly this sort of excitement. They go to Christian concerts with a lot of loud music. They flock to meetings where people are falling on the floor, shaking, or screaming. Although it may have “Christian” trappings, often the results are not spiritual but only emotional.

I have noticed over the years that many believers who are addicted to such “feelings” easily fall into sexual sin. They, being led by their emotions and not by the Spirit, fail to discern the source of such stimulation. Theirs is a sensual Christianity.

Unfortunately, there are many churches today which cater to such believers. They strive to have an atmosphere which will produce good feelings in those who attend and cause them to come back. They build elaborate, beautiful “temples” to inspire the soul. They have loud bands to stimulate the emotions. The preaching is carefully tailored to produce only agreeable feelings and not any kind of conviction or discomfort. The pews are comfortable and the air is cooled. The dance and drama teams are there to provide further stimulation in case the music is lacking or the sermon boring.

Mistakenly, they think that good feelings are an evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. Although such activities may attract large numbers of people and appear successful, they can never achieve the objectives of God. They

simply satisfy the emotions by appealing to the soul life. They do nothing to help us exchange the rulership over our feelings from our life to His.

Do not misunderstand me. When the Spirit of God within our spirit "spreads" into our soul, in our emotions we can experience a great variety of feelings. In fact, this is just what our Lord wants to do. He wants to use our emotions to express His feelings in this world. Since He is an infinite being, He can express Himself in our emotions in an unlimited variety of ways.

Through the Spirit we can feel joy. We can have peace. We can love. This is a love not only for our friends, but for those who are unlovable. This love can even thrive in us for our enemies. Also, in God we can feel sorrow. We can be grieved. We might feel His anger or His jealousy or His boldness. But in order for this to happen, we must submit our emotions to His control. When God rules our emotions, the true personality of Jesus can be exhibited in us.

The question before us is not whether or not we have feelings, but who is governing these sensations. The question is not whether or not a certain manifestation is "right," but which life is the source of the manifestation.

The Spirit of God can lead us to shout, to dance, and to sing. He can stimulate us with many intensely enjoyable feelings. In fact, nothing in this world can compare with the emotions which God can give. However, we must discern the source. God can give good feelings but not all good feelings are from God. God can be exciting, but not all excitement is from God.

Often, after God has given an individual or a group a powerful emotional experience, they then spend their energy trying to recreate that experience through soulish means, i.e. loud music, physical exertion, shouting, etc.

How we need the Word of God to divide between the soul and the spirit within us! We urgently need revelation to know the source from which we are living. If it is the Spirit of God, then the feelings are acceptable. If the source is our own life, then they are totally rejected. Truly "the flesh profits nothing" (Jn 6:63).

When we experience emotional pleasure as a result of the Holy Spirit living in us, this is the experience of the showbread table. This table is also one of the pieces of furniture which is in the holy place, just outside the holy of holies in the tabernacle. In the last chapter we have seen that in our spirit we are able to eat of the "hidden manna" (Rev 2:17) which comes from communion with God. But when we are eating in our spirit, our soul can also be satisfied. It too can know the enjoyment of the presence of God.

Every human being needs emotional pleasure at some time or other. A life with no enjoyment can become unbearable. And so our God in His great wisdom has also provided for us an emotional delight. The loaves of fresh bread can be of great satisfaction when our God chooses to give us this experience.

THE WILL

As we have seen, some believers try to live their Christian life by the efforts of their mind. Others rely heavily on their emotions. But there is still another group. These are ones who have a particularly strong will. Perhaps these are the most difficult cases to treat. Such individuals can make themselves to do almost anything. Through the force of will power, they can meet – at least in their own eyes – whatever standard is set before them.

When they become converted, they simply begin to use their strong will to "live the Christian life." All the principles and admonitions of the New Testament become a new challenge for them to meet by their efforts. Every precept, whether it be tithing, submitting, helping, or any other such thing, is just another opportunity for them to show that they are willing and able to do it.

These individuals believe that they are very committed to God. They are, in fact, using every fiber of their being to do His will. Very often such people look down on those who are weak. Those who cannot overcome persistent sins and weakness are despised because they obviously do not have "a strong enough commitment."

The reason such cases are hard to treat is that people with a very strong will are able to make a good show of Christianity. They are able to “perform” in such a manner that it is hard to find fault and hard to show them where they are erring. Through their will power, they have stopped all obvious sins. They have done all that is expected of them. What could God want more than this? Compared to many others they are really able to do the will of God.

The best hope for such people is that God will arrange a challenge for them which they cannot meet. In His mercy, He can bring them up against a situation which is simply too hard and too big. He can bring them to the end of themselves.

Of course, as we have been seeing, the exertion of our will is not at all what God really wants. All the efforts of the soul life, no matter how good the results may appear, are rejected by Him. Our own righteousness is like filthy rags to Him (Is 64:6). I have been told that the Hebrew word here indicates rags soiled by a woman who is having her menstrual period. Obviously, our Lord is not pleased with such efforts.

His desire is that we would submit the control of our will completely to Him. His objective is that He would be able to use our will to do His will. The only real way to discern when someone is living by the spirit or simply living by the power of his or her will is to sense the “flavor” of what they are doing. Is the result of their efforts the pleasant aroma of Christ? Or is it the stench of self-effort? Are others attracted by the sweetness of their character or repelled by a hard, dry sense of demand? May God have mercy upon us to know if we are merely trying to live for Him or actually living by Him.

THE INCENSE ALTAR

This brings us then to the experience of the incense altar. As we have noted, there are several pieces of furniture in the holy place. We have already spoken about the

lampstand and the showbread table. However, there is also in this room an altar for incense. Interestingly, this fixture is linked very closely with the holy of holies.

Before the high priest could enter the most holy place, he had to take some of this incense and put it in a golden censer. Then, with this sweet smoke rising upward to God from the censer in his hand, he could pass behind the veil.

The human will is key in our relationship with God. He will do nothing which is against our will. That is to say He will do nothing inside our being unless we are completely and thoroughly willing and ready for Him to do it. Therefore, the will is pivotal in our relationship with Him.

If we are to “enter in behind the veil,” our will must be completely yielded to Him. If we are to enter into and live continually in the Spirit, we must have our will offered to Him on the altar. The sweet savor of this incense must always rise before His throne. There must continually be before Him the yielded submission of our will.

If not, we will find it difficult to enter into His presence and impossible to stay in the spirit. True Christianity is not using the force of our will to try to please Jesus, but submitting our will completely to Him so that He can do whatever He wants within us. The total ceding of control – the unconditional offering of our will – is necessary for everyone who will live a truly spiritual life.

The total yielding of our will to God must be considered the beginning point of a genuine walk with the Lord. The necessity of such an offering should be presented in a clear, unmistakable way to all those interested in Jesus. Without it, although some may “receive” Jesus, they cannot go on very far in their spiritual life.

I have met countless numbers of “Christians” who have never made this commitment. They have never fully surrendered control of their will to God. He is not yet Lord of their lives. They cannot progress because they are in a constant battle with the Spirit about who is in charge. They never grow spiritually, they never overcome their problems and sins and they are a constant burden on the other believers around them, all because of this one deficiency:

They have never yielded up their will completely to Christ. Unless you have come to this point without resistance or reserve, you will go nowhere in the spiritual walk.

In order to walk with Jesus in a consistent, daily way, the strength of our will must be broken. We must come to a point when we no longer rely upon our own strength to do the will of God. We must come to the “end of ourselves” so that our strength is only in God (II Cor 1:9).

For those who have a very strong will, this process is often prolonged and painful. Many times our Lord must allow such a person to pass through very severe tests and painful trials so that their natural man can be broken down. The confidence they have in themselves to be able to decide and do can only be touched in a permanent way by failure and suffering.

Jacob was a confident, scheming man. He took advantage of his brother and cheated his father. He managed to extract a lot of wealth from his father-in-law and finally wrestled with God Himself. In the end, God touched his thigh. Something within him was permanently broken so that he was no longer whole.

After this experience his name was changed from Jacob, i.e. one who takes advantage, to Israel, i.e. prince of God. How many of God’s children today need this divine touch, the breaking of the soulish strength to do and be for Him, so that God can finally do and be what He desires through them.

DIVIDING THE SPIRIT AND SOUL

In the last chapter we spoke about what it means to be in the spirit. That is, we are in the spirit when we are experiencing communion with God, when we are sensing His divine leadership, and when we are knowing His law written upon our hearts.

Here we are understanding that not only can we know God in our spirit but He can also give us many experiences, sometimes very powerful experiences, in our soul. However, two points need to be made very clear.

Number one: Even though we can have many enjoyable experiences of the Spirit in our soul, we should be careful never to seek for these “experiences.” If we look for revelation, there are many sources of “revelation.” If we seek emotions, there are many ways in which our feelings can be stimulated, including the action of evil spirits. A wise Christian will not allow his emotions to guide him but will allow God to guide his emotions.

Our necessity is to continually seek after the Person of Jesus Christ. Our urgent need is to walk daily in the spirit. When it is His time, He will give us revelation. When He deems it appropriate, He will give us pleasurable emotions. As we submit ourselves completely to Him in our will, all that we need will flow out from our spirit to our soul.

Number two: We should never be led only by our “revelations” or feelings, but by the presence of God in our spirit. Regardless of what is happening in our soul – that is our mind, emotions, and will – we must always be careful to judge it by our spirit. In every question, we must sense the peace of God in our innermost being. We must walk in constant communion with Jesus, be led by His authority, and know whether or not we are offending Him.

This is the secret: walking in communion with God. Far too many believers rely upon dreams, prophecies, “words,” the advice of others, or direction from “spiritual leaders” for their guidance. Others depend on their emotional sensations to lead them. These are soulish Christians. They are looking continually to the activities of the soul as their source of direction. They are not being truly led by the Spirit but by a great variety of sources which can and do influence the soul.

Certainly our God uses such things as dreams, prophetic words, etc. to speak to us or guide us. These things are important for us in the Christian life. The point here is that we must not depend on these things but always weigh and judge them through our communion with God in the spirit. We must ultimately be led by the spirit, not the soul.

PHYSICAL FEELINGS

How many times through the years have I heard someone exclaim, "Did you feel that?" referring to some physical sensation they had received during a Christian gathering. This may have been goose bumps, a tingling sensation, a warm or cold feeling, a sense of rushing wind, or any number of other things. For them, this was an indication that God was present or that something which was said or done was from Him.

There is no doubt that the Spirit of God can and does produce within us many physical feelings. In Acts for example, He came as a "mighty rushing wind" (Acts 2:2). The Spirit can not only fill our soul but also our physical body. The problem is that far too many believers begin to rely upon these sensations. They depend upon them for their daily direction and guidance. Worse yet, they begin to seek such things as if this were the same as seeking God.

They do not know how to walk in the Spirit and so only are being led by the flesh. God can give us physical feelings, but all physical sensations are not of God. Such stimulation can come from many sources. Therefore, without living in constant communion with God in our spirit, we have no reliable way to judge whether our physical sensations are from Him or not.

When we walk by the soul and are led by soulish and physical sensations, we manifest the nature of the soul and the flesh. For this reason, in the Church today we see so much of the natural man. We see pride, greed, lust, struggles for power, gossip, envy, jealousy, dishonesty, one brother or sister taking advantage of another, and many other such things. These are all a result of depending upon the soul and the faculties of the soul instead of the spirit.

For those leaning on the soul life, the rulership of the Spirit is not experienced. The conviction of sin which we find in the presence of God does not happen. Natural thoughts and feelings are mixed together with spiritual ones in a way that produces a great confusion in the believ-

ers. Not knowing how to live in the spirit, they have no basis to discern which is which.

They may experience a real “touch” from God from time to time, but then try to recreate it by soulish means. They don’t know how to live in genuine, constant communion with Him. Consequently, the churches today are filled with fleshly believers who are having very little victory over sin and the devil.

How we need the living Word of God to penetrate the darkness within us! How we need Him to separate our soul from our spirit! How we need His light to show us how to live by His presence in our spirit and from this place allow Him to reveal Himself through us to the world!

12.

BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

*I*n this book, we have been speaking about the salvation of the soul. We have been investigating God's marvelous plan to create for Himself a bride through whom He can reveal Himself to the world and even the universe. Also, we have been reviewing our responsibility concerning these great truths.

As we meditate upon these spiritual things, we must keep one thing firmly in mind. That is that this work of God within us is truly the work of God. None of these wonderful spiritual realities are something which we ourselves can enter into apart from Him. Philippians 2:12,13 reads: "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to work on behalf of His good pleasure.*" You see, although we must be cooperating with Him, it is really He who is doing the work.

Everything which involves God's work in us is a result of His wonderful grace. We believe in Him because He has had mercy upon us. We grow in Him because of His grace which He supplies to us. We follow Him because of His power which He freely gives us to overcome the obstacles and the enemy. All is a result of His grace. Many define "grace" as being God's unmerited favor. Certainly, this is true. We merit nothing from Him.

Yet, because of His great love for us, He came and died for us. He has freely offered us forgiveness. Even more wonderful than forgiveness, He has given us His own eternal life. And even yet more unbelievable but true, He has opened the way for us to grow up into all that He is, becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet 1:4). This is truly unmerited favor or “grace.”

When we arrive before His throne on judgment day, if there is any good thing within us, we will be able to claim no credit for it. There, no flesh will glory in His presence (I Cor 1:29). All the incredible, glorious work which has been done in us will be the result of His grace and mercy. The love of God will have caused Him to patiently work within us to accomplish all of His will.

Although we may think of ourselves as being zealous, obedient, or consecrated, even this will be shown to be a result of His wonderful grace. This salvation work of God is not based upon our abilities or goodness, but upon His choosing to have mercy upon us. In His presence we will have nothing to be proud of but many things to be thankful for. There, we will worship Him forever for having extended His loving grace to us.

The work which the Holy Spirit is doing within us depends upon our faith. We must have faith in Jesus in order to receive Him. We must also continue to walk in faith in order to grow in Him. All spiritual progress is based completely upon our faith. However, even this faith which we have is a result of God’s wonderful grace. It, too, is not of ourselves, it “is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

Perhaps a good way to understand this is to take a look at the experience of the father of faith – Abraham. By examining just how he arrived at faith, perhaps we can discover how God imparts faith to us. The scripture reads: “...the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision” (Gen 15:1). Then it says: “And he (Abram) believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

The order in which these two events took place is very significant. First, God supernaturally manifested His will and His glory to Abraham. Then Abraham believed. His

response to this heavenly vision was faith. He reacted to this divine revelation by believing that God existed and that what He said was true.

On the other hand, please notice how his faith did not happen. It was not a result of his self-effort or mental concentration. Abraham was *not* walking in the desert one starry night looking into heaven when he suddenly thought, "There must be a God. By golly, I think there really is God. Why, I believe, I believe there is God and He surely must want me to have many descendants."

And God did *not* upon hearing these "words of faith" come rushing down and reveal Himself to Abraham. No, Abraham's faith came in exactly the opposite way. First God revealed Himself and then Abraham believed. It was this kind of faith that pleased God and caused Him to label Abraham as righteous.

What a wonderful event that must have been when God first showed Himself to Abraham. Do you still remember the time when God was first revealed to you? If you are a Christian today it is because at some time and in some way God manifested Himself and your response to this was faith. You may have said something like, "God is real. I've seen Him. He has shown Himself to me and now I believe in Him." Unless you have come to know the one true God personally through the revelation of Jesus Christ, you cannot be a real Christian.

Let's continue here with a brief definition of faith. Faith is the human response to divine revelation. Once God shows us something of Himself, then we can believe. But unless He chooses to reveal Himself to us nothing we can do or think will qualify as real faith. Unless we have "seen" Him in some measure we cannot believe in Him.

We can perhaps give our mental assent to something we have read or heard about God, but this is not what the Bible calls "faith." James tells us that even the demons have a kind of belief in God. They believe and tremble (Jas 2:19). But saving faith – genuine faith – the kind of faith that justifies before God those who possess it, is faith which results from God's revealing Himself.

Unfortunately, not every man's reaction to divine revelation is faith. Many people we read about in the Bible reacted to the manifestation of God's power and divinity with unbelief.

Most of us probably imagine that if God would speak audibly from heaven everyone would surely believe. Nevertheless, this is not the case. Several times in the gospels it is recorded that God did just that. One time Jesus was praying to the Father and said, "Father, glorify your name." In response to this a voice came out from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (Jn 12:28). Even though the entire crowd heard the voice of God, not all believed. Some of them said, "Surely it must have thundered."

Their reaction was one of complete unbelief. They had heard God audibly yet they chose not to believe in the reality of what had just happened. Still another striking instance of such unbelief is seen when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. After this event, we are told that many of His disciples believed on Him. But there were some among the crowd who, even though they had seen the dead raised, did not believe. Instead, their hearts were hardened.

True faith occurs when the human heart responds positively to God. When God through His mercy reveals Himself to us in some way, we are then in a position to choose whether or not to believe. When we choose faith, this brings us into a relationship with God. He responds to our faith response. The result of our belief is intimacy with God. We are then born again. We then receive His Holy Spirit within us. This, however, is not the end. Instead, it is the beginning of a life-long relationship of intimacy with Him.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

One of the main tenets of the modern evangelical church is justification by faith. This means that we are justified before God because of our faith in Him. By this we are intending to say that God is entering into a relationship

with us and is having intimate communion with us, not because of some works which we have done to please Him, but because we believe in the revelation of His Son. Our faith is in Jesus who has shown Himself to us and this is the basis of our relationship with God. Our God, as a result of our faith, interacts with us in an intimate, personal way as if we were completely righteous.

As a result of our faith, He “imputes” a righteousness to us (Rm 4:22-24). This is an act of grace, nothing less. We do not deserve to be thought of as righteous, but through God’s grace, He enters into a relationship with us as if we were really without sin.

However, we must be very clear about one thing. This faith about which we speak – this faith which justifies us today in the eyes of God – is a living faith. It is not merely the fact that we believed in Jesus, let us say, 20 years ago. It is a faith which is active right now.

At this moment, we are responding in faith to what our Lord is revealing to us. We are hearing His voice. We are believing His living word and we are obeying Him. This is the kind of faith which allows God to consider us just.

Far too many Christians are simply hoping that because they believed in Jesus sometime in the past, or because they have agreed with some biblical fact, from then on, God considers them righteous. However, this is not true. In order to be considered righteous by God today, we must have a living, daily, active faith.

Our brother James wrote trying to bring correction to a false impression which was already prevalent in his day that a kind of mental, static “faith” was enough. Perhaps there were some in the church of his day also who supposed that since they had believed “at one time” or “in something,” they were thereby justified.

But James argues against this. He asserted strongly and repeatedly that “...faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:17,20,26). He states that we are justified “by our works” (Jas 2:24). By this he was insisting that our faith should be producing something. It should be manifested daily in our

lives in real, tangible results. It should be revealed through our present, living relationship with God. If it is not, it is a dead faith by which we cannot be and are not being justified. These “works” of which he speaks are not merely good deeds but, instead, are the visible evidence of the submission of our entire life to Christ. They are the actual manifestation of a living faith and daily communion with God.

James is not contradicting Paul by insisting upon “works.” He was not negating the necessity of faith. In no way is he refuting “justification by faith.” His objective was to clarify for us exactly what *kind* of faith is required to justify us before God. He was only insisting that our faith must be a living, active, daily faith.

We must be maintaining an intimacy with Jesus. We must have an up-to-date faith relationship with Him. The proof of this living faith is in the fruit which is visible right now. It is only this kind of faith which is justifying us. James shows that it is by “faith working together with... works” that our faith is “made perfect” (Jas 2:22).

Jesus has opened the way for us. He is freely justifying the ungodly through faith (Gal 3:8). His grace is abundantly available. Yet, how many of God’s own children today are living in a state of unbelief.

In spite of the fact that they once believed, they have turned away. They once walked in intimacy and communion with Him, but today this is no longer their experience. He is speaking to them, but they refuse to hear. He is revealing Himself, but they deny what He is revealing to them. He is correcting them but they do not recognize His hand. For some reason, they do not want to hear what He is saying and so they invent excuses. “That couldn’t be God,” they reason. “He wouldn’t want anything like that from me.”

Thus, they deny Him. They refuse His speaking and so deny His authority in their lives. When this occurs, the work of salvation in their lives becomes stalled. Their intimate communion with God is interrupted. These are no longer “walking by faith” and so God is no longer considering them “just.” Only when they finally repent and

choose to hear His voice can He continue His work of grace in them.

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

Once again, the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness becomes an important example for us. They had been travelling for months through the desert. It had been a long, hot journey. Finally, they came within sight of their objective – the promised land. Before crossing the Jordan, Moses sent out twelve men to enter into the land and spy it out. They were to bring a report of what they found there.

For ten of the twelve men, their experience in Canaan was terrifying. They saw giants there. The cities were fortified and strong. And so they persuaded the people to rebel against the will of their God. These men did not have faith. They did not believe that God would give His servants the power to accomplish what He had commanded them to do. So their lack of faith resulted in disobedience.

This is exactly the way it is with some believers today. They are the children of God. They have received Jesus by faith. They have been baptized, corresponding to the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea (I Cor 10:2). Yet for some reason, they have stopped believing in a living way. They are no longer walking in intimacy with God. Somehow, they have encountered something in the spiritual walk which frightens them.

Possibly, they have come up against some challenge in their life which they believe to be too strongly fortified to overcome. Perhaps Jesus has asked something of them which they are unprepared and unwilling to do. So, they have shut their ears and stopped hearing His voice. They have ceased to respond in faith to His revelation and leadership. Their once intimate communion with Jesus has faded into a bittersweet memory .

When we are living by faith, we are also living in obedience to God. These things go hand in hand. It is impossible to have a living faith relationship with Jesus and be dis-

obedient. When we are not obeying our Lord, we cannot be walking in faith. Our refusal to hear Jesus and do what He says is to live in rebellion. This is a lack of faith. When God leads us in some direction, we must believe that it is the best thing for us.

When He directs us into some area of life which we find frightening, we must have faith that He knows what He is doing and will be with us. When we are confronted with difficult situations, even impossible ones, we must choose to believe that He is able to defeat the enemy through us. Only in this way can we walk in a faith which justifies us before God.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

When we are living in disobedience, we are living in sin. Romans 14:23 states that: "...whatsoever is not from faith is sin." Clearly, if we are not obeying it is because we are not believing. Therefore, since we are not walking in faith, we are not being justified. God is not considering us righteous. Our lack of faith, rather than making us right with God, is causing Him to be displeased with us.

Hebrews 3:13-17 speaks of those who left Egypt but failed to enter in and possess the Land of Promise because of their lack of faith. They were "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Consequently, their carcasses "fell in the wilderness." These things speak to us today.

As we have seen in previous chapters, there are real consequences for our choices today. If we do not continue on in faith, day by day following and obeying Jesus, then we are no longer pleasing to God. We are no longer in a position where we can experience His grace. His displeasure rather than His favor rests upon us.

Therefore, unless we repent and turn back to Him and become willing to do His will, we will suffer the consequences which His word reveals. As we have seen before, one of the most serious consequences is that the untransformed part of our soul will be lost (Mt 16:25, Mt 10:39, Lk 9:24, 17:33, Jn 12:25).

Our “corpses” will fall in the wilderness. We will suffer great, irrecoverable loss. His judgment upon disobedient children will be carried out. If we turn back from following Him in unbelief, then we cannot experience the blessings of faith but only the consequences of disobedience. These are those “whose end is to be burned” by God’s holy presence (Heb 6:8).

Hebrews 3:13,14 urges us to: “...exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” Certainly this was written to believers.

Therefore, this word “if” here is extremely important to us. We must continue on in a living faith relationship with Jesus if we want to receive His favorable rewards. Becoming “partakers of Christ” here must be understood as being partakers of the fullness of Christ since all true Christians have received Him already.

FAITH IS NOT HUMAN HOPE

Many people today, misunderstanding faith, have attempted to make it into a human kind of hope. They mistakenly imagine that if they simply read the Bible, choose passages which please them and give their mental assent to the truths expressed in them, this then qualifies as being faith. Unfortunately, this is only a soulish exercise which can never help us.

No amount of continual restatement of scriptural truths will lead us to genuine faith. Only the supernatural revelation of God can accomplish this. The scriptures read, “and [Jesus] manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him” (Jn 2:11). Once Jesus reveals Himself and His will to us, then we can believe. This is the kind of faith that the Bible is talking about.

Unfortunately, human beings are often blinded to spiritual things by worldly definitions. Just because we have grown up thinking we knew what faith was – that is, giving our mental assent to some idea – we imagine that

this same definition will be good enough to use in our Christianity.

Sadly this kind of mental activity will never work. It merely generates a human kind of hope. Only those who have seen God and responded in faith to Him believe in a way that will cause them to be accounted righteous and enable them to receive what He wants to give them. Our faith – that is, our response to God’s revelation – enables us to enter into what God is showing us.

Many Christians are trying to “believe” that they have something when in fact they do not. For example, they assert that they “have the mind of Christ,” but it is evident from their lives that their thoughts are not dominated by Him.

Their words and actions manifestly show that they do not have the Holy Spirit liberating them from the programming of the world and the devil. Their minds are not filled with Jesus’ thoughts and opinions. Perhaps these same individuals also believe that they are already completely saved, sanctified, and purified. But here, too, their lives make a lie out of this “faith” of theirs. Citing Bible verses, they think that they possess something which, obviously, they do not. Theirs is not a living faith.

UNREALITY IN THE CHURCH

Certainly, God has freely given us “all things” (Rom 8:32). He has opened the way for us to enter into all that He is. But the sad fact is that many are not entering. They are only imagining that they have entered. They are only hearing about these great truths, giving their mental assent to them, and hoping that somehow this will make it true for them.

This kind of activity fills the Christians of our day and the church of our time with a very strong, palpable sense of unreality. Far too many are speaking, praying, preaching, and worshipping about things which are not real to them. Even though these things are true in an eternal sense, they are not real in their lives.

A famous actor once said: "The difference between preachers and actors is this: Preachers speak about things which are true as though they were not true and actors speak about things which are not true as if they were true." What a terrible indictment! What is it about our modern Christianity which produces this kind of unreality which even unbelievers notice? Why is our "belief" not producing results? Why are these precious things not real in our daily lives? There are two main factors which seem to be contributing to this problem.

First, the devil has succeed in obscuring the truth of God. He, through his lies and half truths, has been cheating the children of God out of their inheritance. A large part of his lie is what we have been addressing. That is the belief that we already have these precious, spiritual things of God even though we don't.

He has propagated this error through a mis-definition of faith and grace. Thus, he has deluded Christians into thinking that they do not need to experience these things here and now and that true righteousness only exists in the mind of God. Satan has made the gospel into a kind of fairy tale which is only true in the imaginary world.

This is exactly what Paul warns us about. He predicts that in the last days people will "be turned aside to fables" or fairy tales rather than the truth (II Tim 4:4).

And what is this "fable?" It is something only imaginary. It is the thought that all the promises of God are for tomorrow – a kind of pleasure land in the sky when we die. It is the belief that righteousness and other saintly virtues only exist in the mind of God. It is the attitude that God sees only Jesus and not the way we really are. It is the thought that our rewards are future and physical and have little or nothing to do with our experience today. It is the impression that there will be no negative consequences for disobedience for the children of God.

These are the lies of the enemy. It is a great darkness which hangs heavily over the Church of our day. If what we think is light is really darkness that darkness is really great (Mt 6:23)! The result of believing these lies is that we

are not motivated to press into Christ and take possession of all that He is. Thinking that we have already received everything, we don't expect or seek to experience more. Believing that our "reward" has very little relationship to how we live today, we cease to be concerned about the true condition of our soul. The fear of God is gone.

For many, Christianity only consists of trying to avoid obvious sins which might offend others and continually trying to assure one another that everything is O.K. when manifestly it is not.

This is what it means to "...receive the grace of God in vain" (II Cor 6:1). Even though all good things are being offered to us, we are not taking possession of them. Even though our Lord has done everything for us, we are not allowing Him to do His work in us.

God in His great goodness is not letting His judgment fall upon our attitudes and actions today. But it is clear that this goodness of God should "lead to repentance" (Rom 2:4). It should cause us to open up our lives to Him and let Him do His will. The fact that He has given Himself for us should stimulate us to give ourselves completely to Him.

If we do not experience for ourselves all the wonderful things that God has freely offered to us, we are abusing His goodness. When we do not respond to the grace being offered to us, we have "insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb 10:29).

When the truth of God does not stimulate us to open up our lives and let Him do His work within us, we "fall short of the grace of God" (Heb 12:15). The lies of the enemy and our own stubbornness keep us from what should be rightfully ours.

Second, an important factor which contributes to our lack of spiritual progress today is our unwillingness to die. As we have seen in chapter 5, an important part of God's work within us is to put to death the old life and nature. In order to follow Jesus, we must be willing to "take up our cross" (Mt 16:24), or in other words, we must be ready to die. This, of course, is not what the flesh wants to hear. It is a point at which many stumble and fall. Many love to hear

and drink the “milk of the word” but solid food is not agreeable to them. The “preaching of the cross” is indeed solid food. It is not easy to digest.

The wonderful, almost unimaginable things which Jesus Christ is offering to us are exciting. But there is a price to pay. Even though it is all free, even though Jesus already paid the highest price for us, yet there is still a cost in human terms. In order to take possession of all that God is offering, we must lose our own life (PSUCHÊ) (Mt 16:25). In order for Him to live through us, we must die.

No doubt this is one reason why so few of God’s children seem to be entering in and taking possession of the things of Christ. The cost to themselves is too high. Perhaps they never have been told the whole story. Possibly the “whole counsel of God” has never reached their ears. (Acts 20:27). Consequently, they never sat down to “count the cost” (Lk 14:28).

The unfortunate result is that they are resisting the efforts of the Spirit to try to bring them on to maturity. Not being ready to experience the death of Christ working in them, they refuse the grace of God which would save them from what they are.

Any unwillingness on our part brings an immediate halt to our spiritual progress. As we have seen before, our Lord will never violate our will. So, when we become unwilling for the cross to operate in our lives, when we love what and who we are more than Christ, or when we do not have the willingness to step out in the faith which Jesus is giving us, then our spiritual progress stops.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

We have been speaking in this chapter about imputed righteousness. This is the fact that, because of our faith, God is interacting with us as if we were indeed righteous. However, there is another “righteousness” revealed in the New Testament. This righteousness, too, is a result of our faith. This is the righteousness of God (Phil 3:9).

Our God is forgiving our sins, overlooking our faults and entering into a relationship with us for a purpose. He

is treating us as though we were righteous so that we can actually *become* righteous.

Our genuine faith brings us into an intimacy with God which truly changes us. This relationship, which involves receiving the actual life of God with His divine nature, is meant to alter our being at the most fundamental level. This change is a result of our living faith. It is something which begins to reveal itself in a our character. Through this faith of ours, God begins to transform our soul, exchanging His life for ours and so begins to reveal Himself through us. Thus, we begin to exhibit His own righteousness in us.

This righteousness is "...not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). Yet, even though the origin of it is not us, it has its expression through us. The source is God, but the manifestation is through human beings. This kind of righteousness does not exist only in the mind of God. It is something visible, right here on earth. It is not a result of self-effort, but a product of our daily faith.

You see, our faith which is the source of our relationship with God causes us to obey Him. It impels us to open up our being to Him. It results in our allowing Him to dominate and predominate within us. This is how we fulfill His will.

When our faith is real, then it will produce results. When our faith is living, a genuine righteousness is exhibited in us. The "peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:11) is a tangible thing which God is seeking to establish within us. If we are not exhibiting this fruit, then it is a sign that our faith is not active. Only a daily, living faith, producing intimacy with God really changes us.

Dear brothers and sisters, how we need to be walking by faith today. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). He has done everything for us. His grace is abundantly available to all. Even more faith is available from Him if we are ready and willing to receive it.

Our part is only to respond to Him. What is required of us is simply to submit our lives completely to His authority, receive what He is offering and allow Him to do

His complete work. In this way, God's grace working through our faith will accomplish His will in our lives and we will receive the benefits of the completed work of Christ.

13.

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE

*I*n this chapter, we are going to be discussing a subject which is very holy. The object of our investigation is God Himself. Therefore, I would like to urge every reader, before beginning to read, to take off their shoes – spiritually speaking that is. What I mean to say is this: God is far beyond our human comprehension. He is the Creator and we are but His creatures. It is completely impossible for us to fathom Him or figure Him out.

Consequently, in seeking some enlightenment about this most holy subject, we cannot, indeed we must not, get our minds into gear. Comprehending even the smallest aspect of our God is absolutely not a mental exercise. The only way we will understand anything concerning the Almighty is if He chooses to reveal Himself to us.

Although we cannot comprehend Him, yet He can give us spiritual revelation which far surpasses human wisdom. The early apostles were not educated men. Many of them were simple fishermen. Yet the revelation given to them regarding the person of God is rich and full.

With all this in mind, I would like recommend that all of us together humble ourselves before the Lord. Let us put aside our human logic and reasonings. Let us not trample His courts with our own imaginations and ideas. Let us put away doctrinal preconceptions and theological arguments and worship Him as Creator and King. What He has

revealed in His word is immensely profound. And through His word, He also can reveal Himself to us if and when He so chooses. May He find our attitude reverent and our hearts humble and open to receive all that He wishes to reveal.

To begin, let us ask, how many Gods do we have? Is there one or are there three? We read in the Bible about God the Father, about His Son Jesus Christ, and about the Holy Spirit. But how are we to understand this? The scriptures state explicitly that there is only one God. Galatians 3:20 reads: "...but God is one." James 2:19 says: "You believe that there is one God. You do well." I Corinthians 8:4 confirms this by stating: "...there is no other God but one."

But if there is only one God, who then is Jesus Christ and what about the Holy Spirit? Certainly we will never understand these things by mental analysis. He is far, far beyond our understanding. Significantly, we read in Isaiah 9:6 that the Son of God's name shall be called "Wonderful." I have been told that this means in Hebrew, "so great as to be beyond comprehension." Truly, this is a mystery which cannot be "figured out." It cannot be understood by human reasoning and intelligence but can only be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Many have erred doctrinally by inventing new, extra-biblical phrases and words to try to describe the nature of God. This is dangerous since the words of the Bible were carefully chosen by the authors to express exactly what God was trying to say. The peril here is that once you begin to use words which are not in the Bible, then you have to define just what you mean by each word. Together with this defining process comes human reasoning and logic. Soon, the whole discussion descends into the realms of the soul, being simply an analysis done by the human mind.

Others have tried to make God into different phases or "modes" imagining that He moves or has moved from one to the other. They suppose that now there is no longer the Father but that He has "become" the Son.

Still others have mistakenly assigned different "personalities" to the Father, to the Holy Spirit, and to Jesus.

For them, the Father is somewhat stern, strict, and distant. On the other hand, they think that Jesus is much more approachable and loving and maybe shields us from the Father's harsh, judgmental attitudes.

The Holy Spirit, they imagine, has still other characteristics, perhaps sort of hovering around like a dove who comes upon us once in a while to give us good sensations or do some kind of miracle.

These and many other concepts have been propagated since the death of Christ as a means to "explain" this mystery. But all of these erroneous ideas and methods are simply the product of the human mind trying to understand God. This, of course, is impossible.

How we need to humble ourselves before Him so we can receive the revelation of Himself which only He can give. Let us seek God together for a "spirit of wisdom and revelation" (Eph 1:7) from Him so that we, too, see what the early apostles saw.

THE INVISIBLE FATHER

Let us begin our investigation here by speaking about God our Father. When we meditate in the holy scriptures, one fact becomes clear. One aspect of His person is revealed in a manner beyond doubting: that He is invisible. Colossians 1:15 teaches is that Jesus is the image of the "invisible God." This is exactly the case; we have a heavenly Father who is invisible. Hebrews 11:27 confirms this when speaking about Moses as he was fleeing Egypt saying that he "...endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

Jesus Himself shows us that this "invisible God" is, in fact, the Father when He says: "...not that anyone has seen the Father" (Jn 6:46). Obviously, people have seen the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is quite clear here that no one has seen the Father. And why is this? It is because He is invisible and therefore it is impossible for anyone to see Him.

In John 1:18 we read Jesus clearly stating: "No one has seen God at any time." This phrase is repeated so that there

can be no doubt in I John 4:12 where we read again: "No one has seen God at any time." No one has ever seen God the Father. This is abundantly clear from the New Testament. Again, the reason no one has ever seen Him is that He is invisible and consequently impossible to see. Although this may not be your concept, it is very biblical and true.

Not only has no one ever seen God the Father, but no one ever will see Him. This, too, is a biblical fact. I Timothy 6:16 states for our benefit that God dwells: "...in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen *or can see*." No one ever has seen God and furthermore no one ever can see God. The simple reason for this is that He is invisible, therefore, it is impossible to see Him.

Some may have the idea that, although God is indeed invisible today, someday in the future, He is going to change and become visible for all to see. This is an erroneous idea.

Besides the verses we have read already, I Timothy 1:17 teaches that our King is "eternal, immortal," and "invisible." These three aspects of God are what He is. They are not temporary states of being. When will God cease being invisible? When can we finally see Him?

God will cease to be invisible only when He is also no longer immortal or eternal. Obviously, our God always has been and always will be immortal. He has always been and will always be eternal. In the same way, He has always been and will always be invisible. This means that you cannot see Him and never will be able to see Him.

Undoubtedly, some will be a little confused about this, perhaps remembering various passages such as in Acts 7:55, 56 where Stephen, when he was being stoned, "gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." But please notice here that our brother Stephen saw "the glory of God" rather than the face or form of God.

This revelation of God's glory is repeated in Hebrews 1:3 where we read that Jesus "...sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Seeing "glory" or "Majesty" is one

thing, seeing the Father's form or person is another. It is stated in His word that He dwells in "unapproachable light." Perhaps some have seen this light or glory, but none have ever seen or will see His face.

We can be absolutely sure that neither Stephen nor anyone else saw the Father "in person" because of the scriptures we have reviewed already. Writing long after the fact of Stephen's death, Paul and John both clearly affirmed that no one ever has or can see God (I Jn 4:12, I Tim 6:16).

Since the scriptures never contradict one another, it is certain that what we have stated here is absolutely true. The phrase "sitting on the right hand" of a king, or in this case God, is an expression which indicates that the person shares his power and authority. Certainly, Jesus is "the power of God" (I Cor 1:24) and has "all authority" (Mt 28:18) from the Father.

Once again, I beg you, do not try to figure all this out with your mind and intelligence. The understanding which God has for us will never come in this way. God's revelation is not through the mind, but in the spirit. What we need is not information but revelation. We will absolutely never understand until it is revealed. Let us therefore, enter in together into the presence of God to receive all the He has to give to us.

GOD REVEALED

Even though, as we have seen, the Father is invisible, He does reveal and has revealed Himself. Ever since the beginning of time, God has been expressing Himself to the universe. When God unveils or reveals Himself, this is called in the Bible, His "image." For example, if you were to see my photograph, this could be called an image of me. It would be a revelation of or an expression of myself. This image would tell you a lot about me.

Now, for some reason which is very hard for us human beings to understand, God has called this "image" or revelation of Himself "My Son." According to the scrip-

tures, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is "...the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). This means that the Son is nothing less than God revealed – God manifested. Verifying this fact, we read in II Corinthians 4:4 about: "...Christ, who is the image of God."

You see, when the Father displays His image – when He shows Himself in a way that is perceivable – this is what He calls "His Son." Hebrews 1:3 further clarifies this truth. Speaking about the Son, we read that He is: "...the brightness of His glory and the *express image of His person.*" The revelation of and the expression of the image of God is His Son.

Returning to John 1:18 we read: "No one has seen God at any time." But, "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." You see, the Father is invisible, but the Son has declared Him. He has exhibited Him. He has revealed and displayed Him. The Son of God has manifested, disclosed, and proclaimed the Father. He is His full and complete "image."

The "declaration" of God is the Son. This is truly a wonderful thing! Whenever and wherever the Father reveals Himself, this is what He calls "His Son."

ALL THE FULLNESS

Not only this, but the Son is the complete manifestation of God. That is to say that outside of the Son, the Father does not reveal Himself, but in the Son is the totality of this revelation. Colossians 2:9 states that in Him, "...dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Again in Colossians 1:19 we read: "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell."

Therefore, to know God or to see and understand Him, there is only one place to look – His Son. If we are desiring an understanding of the Father or if we would just like to see what He is like, we only need to look at Jesus. Truly, in Him God is fully and completely manifested.

This is also the reason that it is impossible for anyone to come to God outside of Jesus. He is the way, the truth,

and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn 14:6). Jesus is the unique and full expression of God. The Son is the only place that the Father is “exhibited” or revealed. No one can come to the Father unless He is revealed to them and the only place in which He is revealed is in the Son.

Jesus walked on this earth with His disciples for about three and one-half years. During this time, they had ample opportunity to examine His character. No doubt, they loved His gentle nature. They enjoyed His purity, His strength of purpose, and His great love. I’m sure that every day brought them a new appreciation of just Who and what He was.

Yet with time, some of them became curious. If Jesus was so wonderful, what must the Father be like? So one day Philip came to Him and said something like this: “Jesus, you are really great and we appreciate you very much, but could you please just show us a little glimpse of the Father?”

Jesus was quite startled by this request. He responded by saying: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:8,9). And in another place He asserts: “I and My Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

How about you? Have you too “been with Him” a long time, but still do not really know Him? Perhaps you have been a Christian for many years, yet do not really realize Who He is? Our Lord Jesus is truly the image of the invisible God. He is not some different “personality.” He is the perfect and complete manifestation of the Father. All the attributes of the Father are revealed in the Son.

For example, we know that Jesus was loving. Yet it was not His own love which He expressed but the love of the Father which was revealed through Him. The Bible clearly says that it was the “...love of God which was in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:39). Jesus’ patience, His caring concern, His authority, His gentleness, His holiness, His purity, His zeal – all these were just a manifestation of the

Father. His words and actions were not His own, but were simply an exhibition of the Father's life (Jn 14:10).

When He spoke, it was the Father's authority which was heard. When He worked miracles, it was the Father's power which was seen. Even the expressions of Jesus' face were a display of the Father's heart.

The Father is not some different "personality." This is a great mistake. If we think this way it shows we do not really know who Jesus is. He is, indeed, the exact image of the invisible Father. Truly "...he who has seen [Him], has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

It is clear from the New Testament that God is invisible. Also, it is abundantly plain that no one has seen Him. Yet, when we read through the Old Testament, it seems that many individuals and even groups of people saw God.

For example, Exodus 24:9,10 reads: "Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel." The prophet Amos said: "I saw the Lord" (Amos 9:1). Micaiah, another prophet, also said that he "saw the Lord" (II Chron 18:18). Isaiah too declares that, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Is 6:1).

Who, then, did these people see? Jesus, Paul, and John all emphatically declared that no one, ever, had seen God and that He is invisible (I Jn 4:12, I Tim 6:16). Yet these individuals obviously saw Someone whom they identified as God. How can this be?

The only explanation must be that they saw God "revealed." They saw God's Son. Long before He was known as Jesus Christ, God was already revealing Himself in His Son. It is this Son that was and is "the God of Israel."

Actually, we too will get to see God the Father someday. Revelation 22:4 reads: "...and they shall see His face." But where will we see Him? We will see Him just where the Old Testament prophets saw Him. We will see "...the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*" (II Cor 4:6). This is the only place He is or ever will be revealed.

THE WORD OF GOD

One of the principal ways in which it is possible for anyone to express themselves is by speaking. In fact, without speech, it is very hard to communicate anything to anyone. I remember very clearly coming to Brazil for the first time. I spoke not one word of Portuguese. I did a lot of smiling and nodding, but real communication was impossible with those who did not speak English.

Our words are the very core of our self-expression. Without them, our ability to express ourselves is extremely truncated. An artist may express himself or herself through their creations, but this also is a very limited expression of all that is in their hearts. It is through our words that we reveal our plans and purposes and also the deepest thoughts and sentiments of our heart.

In the same way, God speaks and expresses Himself through words. Since His words are a revealing of Himself, they, too, are His Son. It is very clear that Jesus Christ is the "word of God" (Jn 1:1). He is the summation of all of God's speaking, both to man and to the universe as a whole.

Hebrews 1:2 teaches us that it was through the Son that God created the universe. But how did God accomplish this creation? He spoke. He revealed Himself in speech, speaking into being all that He desired. As we have seen, this unveiling of Himself is His Son.

Also, the Son is the "One" who is holding together all of creation today. We read in Colossians 1:17 that it is in Him that "all things consist." Hebrews 1:3 says that God is upholding all things by the word of His power. Putting these two verses together, we see that the Son of God is indeed the "word of His power."

Perhaps this may resolve for some of you Bible scholars a theological dilemma which has puzzled many for years. The Bible states clearly that Jesus was the "firstborn of all creation." Although some translations have tried to "help" us understand by rendering this as the "firstborn *over* all creation," without a lot of imagination this transla-

tion has very little meaning in the English language. The problem for the scholars is that God's word also indicates that this "Word" who is the Son has always existed. He was clearly "in the beginning... with God" (Jn 1:1).

Therefore, how is it possible that He was "born" at some period of time and that at that "birth" the Father said: "You are my Son; this day have I begotten You" (Heb 1:5)? If He was really "in the beginning with God," how can He have been "born?"

God's Word, the expression of Himself, has always been with Him. In "eternity past," before anything was created, this Word – His Son – was in the "bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18). For example, this message I am writing has been in my heart for years. It is not something which is coming to me as I write, but it has been waiting within me for the time when I would finally sit down and do the work.

So also, God's Word was always with Him, even since "the beginning." You see, there was a "time" before time when God had never spoken. He had never revealed Himself in any way. But He decided within His heart to begin a marvelous creation and, using this creation as a base, set in motion the glorious plan to secure a bride. In order to make this creation, God spoke for the "first time." He "said" and it was (Ps 33:9). This is how the universe was created – through His Word (Heb 11:3).

When He spoke, the Word which had always been in Him came forth from Him – was "born" so to speak. And God said of this word which came forth: "You are my Son, this day I have begotten You." Remembering that Jesus is also "the wisdom of God" (I Cor 1:24), take time to review Proverbs 8:22-31 which gives a very clear picture of this truth.

Possibly this will "explain," too, for those who might wonder about it, how Jesus could say, "My Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). Since we know that Jesus is God (I Jn 5:20) and that the Father is God, how can one be greater than the other? The revelation of the Son as the image of the Father should help us here.

For example, whatever I say or do, is an expression of myself. It is certainly “me” in a very real way. Yet I am and always will be “greater” than my expression. The totality of who I am perhaps will never be fully expressed. So even though I reveal myself in many ways, and this revelation is exactly who I am, I will always be “greater” than any image of myself which is revealed. In this way, the Son could say, “the Father is greater than I” and yet still be completely and totally God.

THE INCARNATION

What we have been discussing here is truly a mystery. It is not something which can be logically figured out but which must be revealed. But there is also a further deepening of this mystery. This Son of God who is the unique and full revelation of the Father – the same One who was “in the beginning with God” – became a man and walked here on the earth.

John 1:14 reads: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Through a woman who was a virgin, Mary, this eternal Son of God was born into this physical world. This is what we call the “incarnation” – the eternal Son receiving a physical, human body. How it was possible for the “fullness of the Godhead” to dwell in bodily form is truly a great mystery.

The scriptures themselves declare this, saying: “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh” (I Tim 3:16). For me it is too profound. I cannot understand it. Yet I know it to be true. The unique expression of the Father became a human being and walked on the earth.

No doubt this, too, was a necessary step to accomplish His eternal plan. As we saw in the first few chapters, God is planning to enter into a marriage union with man. And in order for this “marriage” to take place, the parties to the wedding (that is, those who are getting married) must be

alike. They must be the same kind of being. We have already discussed how it is that God is preparing man for this holy union.

First, He is imparting His own eternal life to those who believe and then through this Life is changing their very nature to be like His. But on His part, too, there has been a kind of "change." The image of the invisible God has become flesh and blood (Jn 1:14). He has taken upon Himself the form of man, not only to redeem us but also so that the marriage union can be consummated between two parties who are the same.

Now there can be God in man and man in God, who together will enter into a holy, intimate, spiritual union. Jesus did not discard His physical body; instead, when He was resurrected, His body was glorified. So, too, at the resurrection of the dead, our mortal bodies will be glorified to be like His.

Perhaps another reason for the incarnation was the desire of the Father to be known in a way which would be much easier to understand for us who are bound to this earth. Before the Son became the "Son of man," God was a distant figure, Someone who most considered to be very unapproachable. He was far away in heaven and man was here on the earth.

But in order to demonstrate His great love which He had for man, He sent Jesus to us. In this way, all that God is became more knowable and approachable. The scriptures say that the first apostles even "handled" with their hands the word of Life (I Jn 1:1). They saw His character. They knew His grace. They beheld His glory (Jn 1:14).

All that the Father was, was manifested to them in the Person of the incarnate Son. Thus, it was and is possible to know God in the most personal, real way. Through the Son, all that the Father is is revealed to us.

Still another reason for the incarnation of the Son was the necessity for a sacrifice. Due to man's sin, the plan of God had been evidently thwarted. The possibility of man receiving the holy life of God was completely removed when Adam and Eve entered into sin.

As we have seen, in God's eyes, only death could remove this stain. And so our loving Father sent His Son to die as a substitute for us. For this, a human body was necessary. As we have seen, eternal life cannot die, so the Son also needed to receive a human life along with a physical body. Having been incarnated as a man, He could then offer Himself up for our sins. This, too, is part of God's incredible plan.

THE WORD OF LIFE

This creation in which we live was brought into being by the Father's Word. He spoke and it was. However, this creation is not the only creation which God has made. He already has begun a new creation (II Cor 5:17). This work, too, has been and is being done through His Son. God is speaking today through His Son, and those who receive this Word have something wonderful happen inside of them. In them a new creation has begun.

The Living Word, entering into a human being, begins this work. And it is this same Word, being heard and received every day, that is causing this new creation to grow and expand. Day by day, as we are in communion with God and "hear" and obey His living word, something new and incredible is happening within our being. God is speaking into us, and through this speaking, He is doing a new creative work.

Although this work is being done in secret (that is that it is hidden inside our old bodies), it is very real. Someday when Jesus comes for us, all that has been newly created inside of us will be revealed. This "earthen vessel" (II Cor 4:7) will break open and the glory of God will pour out. The glorious character and nature of Jesus will then be on display through us for all the universe to see.

II Thessalonians 1:10 speaks about "when He comes in that day to be glorified *in* the saints and to be admired *in* all those who believe."

How important it is for us, therefore, to be continually open to receive more of God's living word. The more

His word penetrates our hearts, the more His new creation grows within us. Not only is it important for us to read the Bible, but it is essential that we “hear” our Savior’s voice speaking to us through its pages.

Not only is it essential that we have communion with God, but through this communion allow His word to do His work inside of us. The living word, this Person who is the manifestation of all that God is, is speaking into being a holy, righteous creation. The more we are willing and ready to receive this word, the more we will be changed into His image.

Although it is not the subject of this writing, perhaps it would be good to say a few words about the Holy Spirit. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, many people have misconceptions about the Spirit, including the idea that He has a different personality from either the Father or Jesus Christ.

To investigate this further, let us go back a few chapters to our discussion of man. We learned there that we have a body, a soul, and a spirit. This spirit which we have is not a separate individual or personality from us. It is simply our human spirit. In the same way, the Spirit of God is not a separate being with its own personality, but simply the Spirit of God.

For example, when Paul says: “...when you are gathered together along with my spirit... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh...” (I Cor 5:5). You see, Paul’s spirit “was there with them.” But this “spirit” was not a separate being from himself. It was not another personality.

When you ascribe any other personality to the Holy Spirit than that of Jesus and the Father, you enter into serious error. You create more than one God. Yet, we know with certainty that we have only one.

We do not have three separate beings with three distinct personalities for our God. We have one God who expresses Himself through His image, His son, and whose Spirit fills the universe.

14.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

*W*hat is our hope? As believers, what is it that we are hoping in and hoping for? For a Christian, hope forms an important part of their spiritual experience. Along with faith and love, it is one of the three things which endure (I Cor 13:13). But what is it? What does it consist of? These are the things which we will be discussing in this chapter.

Paul prays that: “The eyes of [y]our understanding being enlightened” we would “know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18). This is truly what we need.

All of us need further supernatural revelation concerning the wonderful things of God. We need our spiritual “eyes” opened to see. We need to look deeply into His marvelous plan. Then with this vision burning in us, we can give ourselves completely to Him so that His purposes can be accomplished in us.

However, before we can really know what our hope is, it may be necessary for us to disabuse ourselves of some things which can substitute for what is genuine. We must free our minds from any myths, partial truths, or outright lies which give us a human concept but no spiritual revelation.

Any “understanding” which is not true will block our ability to receive what is true. Any concept which does not flow from the throne of God but from the minds of men will certainly hinder us from seeing His truth. When we

think we already know something, our minds become full and satisfied, making it very hard for us to receive anything more. This blind, closed position is especially lamentable if what we think is light turns out to be only darkness.

Therefore, it is imperative to spend time here in this writing not only declaring what is true, but also examining some very common false ideas which take the place of divine revelation in the minds of some believers. May God have mercy upon us to reveal His own truth as we look into these things together.

As we have stated many times in this book, our God has graciously offered to anyone who wishes the opportunity to receive His own eternal life. Once we possess this Life, we are then able to grow up spiritually into all that He is, becoming mature sons. Then, being so changed, we are prepared to enter into a holy marriage union with our Creator.

Therefore, the true gospel message is a message about our destiny. It is about who and what we can become. It is about a radical life change from something earthly to something glorious and eternal. Yet somehow, subtly, this wonderful good news has been altered. The message we hear so often today is no longer about our destiny but about a destination. The focus of our attention has been shifted from what we can “become” to “going someplace and getting something or some things.”

Instead of preaching and thinking about what we will *be* when we die, many are focused upon “where we will go” or “what we will get.” For many Christians these days, their hope is in a place called “heaven.” That is to say that they are looking forward to a destination, an address where they will live forever.

This place is perhaps, in their minds, a kind of celestial “Disney World” which offers many kinds of entertainments and a variety of physical, earthly sorts of pleasures. Not only, they think, will they have plenty of ease and enjoyment, but they will also have a huge mansion and an unlimited supply of gold to spend on what they want. Naturally, Jesus will be there in case we need Him for any-

thing. Some imagine they will spend their time playing golf. For others, perhaps surfing or sailing fills their hopes. Many think that his or her favorite pastime will be available to ensure that they are happy and not bored. To sum up what many believe, "heaven" must be like a kind of "pleasure land" similar to a Muslim "paradise."

The problem with all this is that these things are not the truth. This is only an imaginary idea, constructed from a few misunderstood Bible verses. It is an earthly, human concept about eternity which is not the message of Jesus Christ.

Since it is not true, it has no spiritual power. It has no authority to impact our lives in any real way. It has no influence to bind the hearts of men to what they hope for. Therefore, it cannot serve as an anchor of the soul "within the veil" (Heb 6:19) which will see them through times of temptation and trial.

This "glory land" message is merely a soulish, worldly system of thought which is impotent to impact the lives of the human race. The preaching of it cannot save souls and the "believing in it" will not change our lives or attitudes. The reason for this has already been stated: it simply is not true. Only God's truth has real power.

Think about it. Such material comforts along with physical riches and pleasures can be obtained by people on this earth today. Many in the world today are consumed with exactly these things. They want to "go somewhere" new, different, and exciting. They want to take a vacation to some exotic location or other.

The pursuit of "things" is also rampant. New and larger televisions, boats, cars, clothes and an infinite variety of things are what many people of this world strive for and live for. You see, destinations, things, and pleasures are the pursuits of this world, not of the kingdom of God.

If these are the goal, why not seek them here and now? If these things are God's plan for us, then why should we not, by all means and using all effort, seek to lay hold of these things today in this lifetime? That way, we can have some of them now and even more later.

But the objectives of the spiritual life are different. They have nothing to do with where we might go or what we might get, but everything to do with “who” we might become. True spiritual goals are not the same as those of the world.

I remember speaking to a large group of believers in a poorer country some years ago. Trying to clarify for them the true hope of glory – the genuine spiritual riches which we should be pursuing today – I said something like this: “If having a large house, three cars in the garage and plenty of money to spend is heaven, then the United States is heaven.”

How shocked I was to see the entire audience nodding their heads in agreement. For them, according to the gospel which they had received and were believing, the U.S. was, if not heaven, the closest thing to it. Dear brothers and sisters, this is not the true gospel message! It is only a poor human idea of what eternity will be like.

Possibly, stating that our rewards will not be physical or sensual may startle some of you readers. It may be that you have been already “believing in” these kinds of things for many years. I have no wish to offend you. So please, I urge you, do not shut your mind off, but let us open to God together, examine the scriptures without prejudice or preconception, and let us see what the eternal plan of God really is.

OUR TRUE “MANSION”

To begin, it seems necessary to speak about the heavenly mansions which many believers are hoping to receive. Simply put, there are none. That’s right, there will be no mansions, as we think of them, in “heaven.” Now I know as well as you do the verse where Jesus says: “In my father’s house are many mansions” (Jn 14:2 KJV). But this is a very poor translation. The word translated “mansions” here should be “dwelling places” or habitations.

Paul the apostle explains for us what this “habitation” really is. It is our new glorified body which we will receive.

II Corinthians 5:1-4 reads: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven if, indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by [ZOË] life."

You see, our new "house" or habitation will be our new body. It has nothing to do with a building or physical house. It is not a mansion. The "place" which Jesus is preparing for us is our celestial body in which we will dwell for eternity. This glorified body which we will receive is the only "mansion" we will get. Please notice that in verse one this "house" is "in the heavens" but in verse two we see that when we receive it, it is no longer in heaven but "from heaven."

Eternity will not have separate "housing" for everyone. The modern Christian concept of the New Jerusalem being divided up into subdivisions or apartments is erroneous. I have even heard believers making calculations based upon the measurements of the city to find out how much "space" each one will have.

The new Jerusalem is not a cube which might be divided up into many living compartments. Even though the height, width and breadth are equal, it is still not a cube. Instead, it is a mountain. Hebrews 12:22 reads: "For you have come unto *Mount Zion* and to the city of the living God, the *heavenly Jerusalem*..."

In eternity, living on the new earth, there will be no need for an earthly kind of house. We will not need to sleep, since there will never be any night or tiredness (Rev 21:25). Therefore, bedrooms will not be necessary. We will not need to cook food, so kitchens will not be needed. We will not need to use the bathroom; consequently, this place too will be unnecessary. There will be no need for privacy since everything will be open and exposed to everyone. The entire new Jerusalem is "clear as crystal" (Rev 21:11).

There is nothing hidden there. There are no interior walls, barriers, or dark corners in which to hide. There will be no place to “get away” and do something you do not want others seeing. There will be no desire to “have some privacy” from the others and from God Himself. There will be no divisions, nothing hidden or dark, no special groups, or secrets.

If this does not appeal to you, perhaps you still have within your heart areas of thought and desire which have not been brought into the light of God. Perhaps you are in need of a further cleansing work of the Holy Spirit to bring all that you are into this light. In this way, and only in this way, will you be prepared to live in God’s presence for eternity.

When our Lord comes, all resistance, all darkness, all hesitation on our part to be intimate with Him will be completely exposed. Any fear, any rebellion within our souls or lack of love for Him and Him alone will become totally obvious to ourselves and everyone else. Today we see Him only through “a glass darkly” (I Cor 13:12). On that day we will meet Him face to face.

In the blazing, pure light of His countenance, everything will be seen for exactly what it is. When He appears, any way in which we have deceived ourselves, hoping that we are right with God even though we don’t feel right, will be seen for what it is. Any excuses we invented for not seeking Him with all our heart and not doing His will shall be revealed. All the secrets of our heart will be made manifest.

JESUS IS COMING FOR HIS BRIDE

Jesus is coming for His bride. He is coming for the one He is going to marry. This speaks to us of great intimacy. Song of Solomon 1:4 says: “The king has brought me into His chambers.” But what “chamber” is this? Is it His office? Could it be His throne room? No, it is the bed chamber. This figure of speech speaks to us of unparalleled intimacy. It is using human language to describe our future spir-

itual union with Christ. There will be no secrets there. There will be nothing hidden or covered.

Do you remember in chapter one where we spoke about the first wedding, the marriage of Adam and Eve? There in this prophetic chapter about the future “marriage,” the scripture says that “...they were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). What does this mean to us?

It refers to just the subject at hand. It speaks of being completely without “covering,” that is that everything is totally open, exposed, and in the light. Yet in this state of “nakedness” they were not ashamed. This is because they had nothing to hide. Yet, when they entered into sin, this great comfortableness with openness and transparency vanished. Because of their sin, they suddenly then felt an urge to be covered and to hide.

What about you? Will you be comfortable with such intimacy with God when He comes? Will you be happy to learn that He knows everything about you – all your actions, attitudes, and words? Are you living today in this kind of genuine transparency and intimacy with Him? Have you confessed all? Have you brought everything into His light for Him to examine and judge? Are you daily living in this kind of spiritual “nakedness” with Him?

If not, then you will be ashamed at His coming (I Jn 2:28). You will be embarrassed and want to hide. You will be exceedingly afraid to meet Him, knowing that all will be exposed.

Many Christians insist that they are waiting anxiously for the day when Jesus comes. They shout, they sing, and they pray for His appearing. But when the sky opens and He begins to appear, many of these same people will begin to look for a place to hide themselves. They will suddenly realize their true inward condition. Their sin, which they have been hiding from themselves and others, will quickly become obvious.

Any “playing at church” or pretending to be in a better spiritual state than they really are will stand out starkly in the light of His countenance. Isaiah 33:14 reads: “The

sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites." These will be the ones who will be seeking a place to hide themselves.

NO PHYSICAL REWARDS

There will no piles of gold or silver waiting in the New Jerusalem for us to spend. There will be no need for money. There will be no stores in which to spend and no products to buy. There will be no one trying to use the needs of the other to enrich themselves. There will be no one who has necessity nor anyone who is striving to have more than another.

In fact, we will have no needs whatsoever. God Himself will be all we want or care to have. There, no one will need or want entertainment, pastimes, or sensual pleasure. Any such diversion would simply be a distraction from the wonderful presence of God.

I am not saying that there will be no pleasure of any kind. In fact, I am quite sure that being with Jesus will be the most pleasurable experience anyone could ever imagine. Surely, in His presence is "fullness of joy," and "at His right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps 16:11).

It is just that these pleasures will be different. They will be spiritual, not earthly. The things and enjoyments of this earth, to which we so desperately cling, will be nothing to us and even today are nothing in comparison to what God has to give.

It is our privilege today to have a "foretaste" or a little sample of these spiritual realities. Here and now we can abandon our appetite for earthly, sensual pleasure and learn how to enjoy God Himself. This enjoyment is not something different from what we will know in the future, but just a very limited sample of the real thing.

OUR EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD

It is certainly true that Jesus taught us to lay up "treasures" in heaven (Mt 6:20). And also, that "our hope is laid up for us in heaven" (Col 1:5). But there is another fact which we must be careful to remember. Jesus clearly states

that when He comes, He is bringing this “reward” with Him to the earth. He says, “...behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me” (Rev 22:12).

Our “reward” may be in heaven now, but it will not stay there. It will be brought to the earth at the coming of Jesus Christ. And what is this reward? Since it will not be silver or gold or other kinds of earthly riches, what could it be? Significantly, God spoke to Abraham, “I am your shield and your exceeding great reward” (Gen 15:1).

You see, God Himself is our reward. He and He alone will be the one whom we enjoy. Our reward is not a destination such as heaven (or even a new earth). It is not riches like silver or gold. It is a Person. It is the opportunity to enter openly and fully into His presence and enjoy all that He is.

Further, as we saw in chapter 7 about the judgment seat of Christ, our ability to enjoy this reward – which could be thought of as the “size” of this reward – will be governed by our spiritual maturity .

Do you feel disappointed by this? Does this seem like you are being cheated out of what you have been wanting? Have you been hoping for lots of other entertainments and pleasures? Have you set your heart on a “mansion” in the sky? Then this is a sign that you do not yet really know God as you should. You have not yet had your spiritual eyes opened to see. You are still bound by an earthly, human understanding of eternity.

But let me state this with all boldness: God is everything! He is all we will ever want or need. He is the creator of all the “things” which we value so much. He is so much greater than our tiny, little earthly “pleasures” as to make them look ridiculous and paltry in comparison. He is all in all. In His astounding, intense, glorious presence we will think of nothing else and if we do, it will only be to be ashamed of it. Truly God Himself will be our “exceeding great” reward.

No doubt, when we are with Jesus, there will be many things for us to do. Yet it is not these things which will provide our enjoyment. It is not activities or places which will

be our reward or our satisfaction. We will not be looking to them as a source of entertainment or diversion. Instead, being fully satisfied in our God, we will also find joy in serving Him and assisting Him in doing His will in the universe.

These activities will not be the source of our happiness but the result of our delight which we have in our Lord. Our attention and our desires will be fully focused upon Him rather than on anything which we might do, anywhere we might go, or on anything which He could give us. Our relationship with Him, our intimate enjoyment of His person, will command our complete affection. Nothing else will ever compare with or intrude upon the delight of this indescribable intimacy.

MY SISTER, MY SPOUSE

Perhaps you will remember from the first chapter how we spoke about Adam, together with God, seeking a suitable companion. First, they looked among the animals. They examined each one to see if it could satisfy the requirements. None of them was suitable because none of them were the same as Adam.

Then, after God made Eve, Adam awoke and saw her. He exclaimed, "Now this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). In the same way, our Lord Jesus is seeking a bride. But she, too, must be the same as He is. She also must correspond to Him in every way. She must be "bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh" spiritually speaking. She must be of His own life and nature.

In order to accomplish this purpose, God made His own life available to man. When we receive this Life, we then enter into the family of God. We become a new kind of eternal creature, a child of the Most High.

When Jesus Christ came to earth, He was "the only begotten" Son of God (Jn 3:16). That is to say, He was the only "child" God had produced. Later however, this changed. The Father has now begotten many more children. Today, Jesus Christ is no longer called the "only begotten" but "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rm 8:29).

Many young Christians and even unbelievers ask, "Who did the first sons of Adam and Eve marry?" Undoubtedly, the answer must be that they married one of their own sisters. No other choices were available. There were no other people with whom to mate. Since in those days people lived for hundreds of years, there was ample time for Adam and Eve to have many, many offspring.

Interestingly, Jesus too will marry His "sister" – spiritually speaking. He calls His bride in Song of Solomon (4:9,10,12) "my sister, my spouse." She has the same Father. She is from the same family – the family of God. She shares the same eternal life as He. He must marry His "sister" since there are no other choices. There are no other eternal beings available to generate children from which He could choose.

Not only must Christ's bride have the same "variety" of life, but she must also possess the same nature. She too must be holy. She too must be pure and without sin. The scriptures teach us that Jesus will present His bride unto Himself "...a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she should be holy and blameless before Him in love" (Eph 5:27).

The forgiveness of God opens the way for us to receive the life of God. And the life of God is the agency through which we can be transformed into the nature of God. We can, indeed we must, "...become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust" (II Pet 1:4).

This holy nature is also a requirement for marriage. Inwardly we must be like Christ. If we are not like Him, how can we join in this intimate union with Him? The Bible says, "He that has this hope within himself, purifies himself, even as He is pure" (I Jn 3:3).

In order for there to be a marriage of the Lamb and His bride, she must have the same life and the same nature. But there is still another requirement. She must have the same kind of body. This, too, has been taken care of by our Lord.

Some day when He comes for us, we will enter into glory. This means that our bodies will be glorified to be

like His. Please pay careful attention to this fact. Biblically speaking, “glory” is not a place. It is a state of being. It is not a place to which we will go but a condition into which we will be translated.

Christians are not looking forward to being in “glory land” or “heaven” but to being glorified. This is our hope. Our hope is not in where we will go but in what we will be. It is not a hope of going “somewhere” but of becoming something glorious. Colossians 3:4 reads: “When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

If we wish to know what this body will be like, we need only to look at the first part of the book of Revelation. There we read about how Jesus looks “in glory” – in His glorified state. “His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters... His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength” (Rev 1:14-16).

This awesome, burning, bright, figure is our Lord in glory. It is Jesus in His glorified body. This spectacle was so intense that our brother John “fell at His feet as dead” when he saw Him (Rev 1:17).

This, brothers and sisters, is real glory! This too is our hope: that we will be glorified to be like Him. I John 3:2 reads: “...when He is revealed, we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” Our body will be changed “...in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye” (I Cor 15:52) to be exactly as He is. The scripture teaches us that: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

Interestingly, this new body is “under construction” right now. He is “preparing” this place for us. Possibly this is related to our spiritual growth. It is probable that the more we mature spiritually, the more glorious our spiritual body becomes. Then when Jesus appears, our new, glorified body will appear in exact harmony with what we are inwardly.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

This, dear friends, is our hope. It is the hope of glory. It is not the hope of a destination but of our destiny. It is not a hope of where we might go or what we might get, but of becoming all that Christ is. How we need a revelation of this truth! How we need to “behold His glory” (Jn 1:14) as the early disciples did.

Without a revelation of Jesus’ glory, we have no hope. If we only think about physical rewards such as places or things, we are destitute of any real revelation which will change our lives. But once we see the glory of God, once we see what it means to be glorified, once we glimpse the glory of the age to come, then we will certainly cast aside every “...weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us” (Heb 12:1). When we have seen “glory,” nothing else matters any more. When we see what is really being offered to us, all else pales in comparison.

Biblical hope is “the hope of glory.” We “...rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rm 5:2). This hope is a result of revelation. When God reveals His glory to us, then and only then do we know what we have to look forward to. It is then that we realize what “the hope of our calling” is (Eph 1:18). It is then that we have spiritual understanding.

This revelation of God’s glory which is to be our inheritance indeed serves as an “anchor” for our souls. It is a revelation which captivates our minds and hearts so that nothing else could ever seem better. Any cost which might have to be paid to reach this goal is more than worth it. Paul says that he “...counts the sufferings of this present time to be nothing compared to the glory which will be revealed in us” (Rm 8:18). Notice here that this glory will not be revealed “to” us but “in” us.

In the last chapter we spoke about who Jesus Christ really is. He is the incarnated Son. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the instrument through which the Father reveals Himself to the universe – the “brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3).

But here in the word of God we read about an even more unbelievable, glorious hope. The Bible says that we can be changed into this same image. II Corinthians 3:18 reads: "But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being changed into that *same* image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

How incredible! How unimaginably wonderful! We, small, insignificant human beings can be transformed into the "same image" – the image of the invisible God. We can not only behold His glory today, but through this beholding we can be changed into what we see. From one degree of glory to another degree of glory we can be transformed into what He is.

This is really hope! This is something to fix our hope firmly upon. This something worth more than anything in the universe. This is something which is worth going through whatever is necessary to obtain it. It is worth giving up anything, denying ourselves anything, worth even giving up our own lives to obtain. What a contrast this is to poor, shabby, human ideas about what "glory land" will be like, or desires for earthly pleasures.

In John 17:21,22 we have a record of Jesus praying to the Father. He is not praying for Himself but for us. This prayer is most incredible. He states that "...the glory which You gave Me I have given them." And for what purpose is He giving us His own glory? It is so that we "...may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in Us."

For many years I believed that Jesus was praying for unity among Christians. Today, however, I have a much different view. Now I see that He is praying for us to participate in the union which He has with His Father. His heart's desire is that we would become "one" with Him just as He is one with His Father. He is asking for a spiritual, glorious union to occur between Himself and those who love and follow Him.

This joining, this intimacy is so incredible, so great that it is hard to imagine it could be true. He is opening the

way for us to share in the union and communion which He has with the Father. The Father in Him and He in us, so that this holy, incredible unity between the Father, the Son and the bride could be made perfect.

ALL THAT HE IS

God is infinite. He is eternal. His creativity is unlimited. His power is boundless. His beauty is unsurpassed and His glory astoundingly brilliant. Our King is totally kind, generous, loving, just, and good. He is the one who has made everything that exists and will yet make everything over again in a new way (Rev 21:5).

There is no other being in the universe who compares in power and glory with even the smallest fraction of all that He is. The word of God teaches us all these things. Yet, in the Bible we also can discover what is called "good news."

It is a fact so good that it is almost unbelievable, yet it is true. God is not keeping all this to Himself! He has a desire deep in His heart to share all this with men. He has invited those who have a willingness to submit themselves completely to Him, to come and participate in all that He is. God's plan is that we, mere human beings, could enter into and partake of all of the Divine glory, nature, and authority.

We can even "sit with [Him] on His throne" (Rev 3:21). This is not saying that we can just "sit on His lap" a little. This means to participate in the rulership of the universe together with God. Meditate a while on that!

Just as a bride after she is married can share everything with her husband, so we too are invited to participate in all that God has and is. A wife shares her husband's home. She has access to his financial resources. She participates in his social status. In a proper marriage, because she is submitted to him, she has access not only to all that he has but also to all that he is.

So too, we have been called to be the bride of Christ. God is graciously opening the way for us to become par-

takers with Him of His glory and kingdom. Oh, how we need a spiritual vision! How we need our “eyes” opened to see what our future can be! We need to see the goal. We desperately need to understand what it is that we are laboring to enter into.

Paul, praying for the Christians of his day, asks that: “...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph1:17,18).

What riches! What glory can be our inheritance! If we only could see just a small part of this spiritual reality, we would forsake all else and run unhindered after Him.

Brothers and sisters, we can be Christ’s bride! We can be changed to be like Him so that we can enter into a marriage union with Him. From one degree of glory to another degree of glory, we have the unparalleled possibility of entering into and taking possession of this good land. We can become “bone of His bone” and “flesh of His flesh” – spirit of His Spirit, life of His Life, nature of His divine nature. We can and shall become just like He is.

“But we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone that has this hope in himself, purifies himself, even as He is pure” (I Jn 3:2,3).

How about you? Are you having a foretaste of this experience today? Is Jesus your focus and delight or are you seeking satisfaction from earthly pleasures and experiences? Is your entire heart, soul, mind, and strength devoted to living in loving intimacy with Jesus?

Perhaps it would be good for all of us to pause a moment here and contemplate these things. As we have been seeing, our relationship with our God is the most important factor in our lives. Our love relationship with Him is what will bring us into all the spiritual maturity which we need to obtain all the spiritual “rewards” which are to come. Compared to this, everything else is just an empty shadow.

Today is the day to repent if we are not living completely for Him. Today is the time to hear His voice and return to our first love. After Jesus comes, there will be no other opportunity. There will be no second chance. God is calling to us. He is extending His mercy and grace today to any and all who will respond.

No one is too weak. No one is unable. His power is available to anyone and everyone who is willing to hear His voice and give themselves completely to Him. Today is the day of salvation.

The invitation has been given. "The Spirit and the bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17). This is God's wonderful offer. If we neglect it, we are the most foolish of all people.

In the New Jerusalem, there is no need of any light. The invisible God is there illuminating everything with His glory. This light is being held and exhibited by the "lamp" which is the Lamb of God (Rev 21:23 American Standard Version). The holy city then functions as a great exhibition of God's character and His works, through which this light is radiating.

All the transformed believers, signified by the many precious stones which decorate the "wall" of the city, will have become a sort of display to the universe.

The many faceted character of God will be seen through the individual personality of each one. The wonderful works of God which He has done in the lives of all "just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23) will be available for anyone to see.

The unfathomable love, mercy, and grace of God will be exhibited. The Bible teaches us that "...the woman is the glory of man," which is to say of her husband (I Cor 11:7). Therefore, this glorious "woman," the bride of Christ, will serve as an ample, heavenly expression of all that Jesus Christ is and has been to those who are a part of her. Indeed, "He shall come to be glorified *in* His saints, and marveled at *in* all those who believe" (II Thess 1:10).

One day there will be a glorious, heavenly wedding. Will you be there? Will you be ready to take part in it? The wise in heart will prepare themselves. They will pay any price necessary to obtain it. They will be there when the "...voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings..." announces that "...the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Rev 19:6,7).

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